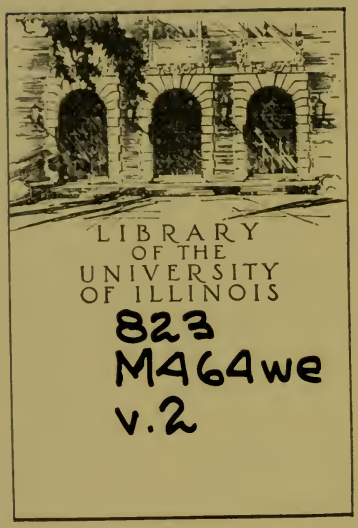
LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
823
M464we
v.2

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

**Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.**

**To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

DUE: 10-25-65

AUG 0 5 ...

L161—O-1096

# WEAVERS AND WEFT

## And other Tales

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
JOHN MAXWELL AND CO.
4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
1877
[*All rights reserved.*]

823
M464we
v. 2

# CONTENTS TO VOL II.

WEAVERS AND WEFT, *continued:*

| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | 'EXCELLENT BASILISK! TURN UPON THE VULTURE | 1 |
| II. | GILBERT ASKS A QUESTION | 28 |
| III. | READY FOR THE WORST | 40 |
| IV. | CAUGHT IN THE TOILS | 52 |
| V. | CROWNER'S QUEST | 69 |
| VI. | CRUEL KINDNESS | 82 |
| VII. | AFTER MANY DAYS | 99 |
| | IN GREAT WATERS | 127 |
| | SEBASTIAN | |
| I. | A FINE GENTLEMAN | 181 |
| II. | AT HIS GATES | 191 |
| III. | THE MIDSUMMER RENTS | 200 |
| IV. | BENONI'S DOOM | 213 |
| | LEVISON'S VICTIM | 228 |
| | CHRISTMAS IN POSSESSION | 262 |
| | JOHN GRANGER | |
| I. | A GHOST STORY | 308 |

# WEAVERS AND WEFT.

## CHAPTER I.

'EXCELLENT BASILISK! TURN UPON THE VULTURE.'

If Fortune in a general way is a capricious and uncertain divinity, assuredly that particular goddess who presides over the affairs of racing men is most given to tricks and starts, to sudden frowns and unexpected smiles.

Gilbert Sinclair's new stables had, up to the beginning of this present year, brought him nothing but ill-luck. So unvarying had been his reverses that his trainer and grooms gave full scope to their superstition, and opined that the stables were unlucky, and that no good would ever come out of

them. 'There had been a murder committed, may be, somewheres about,' suggested one man, 'or the ground had been wrongfully come by—who could tell?'

With the Craven meeting, however, the tide turned, and the Sinclair stables scored three palpable hits. But this was not all. A colt which Mr. Sinclair had bought at York two years before, with all his faults and all his engagements—the engagements being particularly heavy, and the faults including one which the veterinary authorities believed might be fatal to the animal's career as a racer. The colt was of renowned lineage on both sides, and boasted a genealogy that bristled with famous names—a colt in whose future some magnate of the turf would doubtless have speculated two or three thousand, but for that unlucky splint in the off fore leg.

Gilbert Sinclair bought the colt for two hundred and fifty guineas, under the advice of his trainer, a shrewd Yorkshireman, who loved a bargain better than the best purchase made in a regular way.

'He's got the Touchstone and the Spectre blood

in him,' said Mr. Jackson, the trainer. 'He's bound to come out a flyer, if we can get rid of the splint in that off fore leg.'

'But suppose we don't, Jackson?' said Gilbert, doubtfully. 'Two hundred and fifty's a lot of money for a lame horse, and his engagements will come to a good bit more.'

'You may as well lose your money on him as on anything else, mayn't you?' argued Mr. Jackson, who had no exalted opinion of his employer's judgment, and did not trouble himself to pretend a greater respect than he felt. The best of men is but small in the eyes of his trainer. 'You let me have that there colt to nuss, and say no more about it. It 'll be a fad for me. I ought to have my fancy sometimes. You have yours, and a fat lot comes of it.'

Thus urged, Gilbert bought the colt, and John Jackson took him under his wing, and made him his pet and darling, shutting him up in impenetrable loose boxes, and exercising him secretly at unearthly hours of the morning, in sequestered paddocks far from the eyes of touts. Mr. Jackson had children—infants who climbed his knees and called him 'father'

in childhood's lisping syllables, but there was a pride in John Jackson's eye and a tenderness in his voice when he spoke of Goblin, the bay colt, which his own flesh and blood had never been able to evoke.

'I want to win the Derby before I die,' he said, with a touch of sentiment, like Moses sighing for the land of Canaan. 'It isn't much to ask for, after having done my duty by a blessed lot of screws.'

Nobody—not even Mr. Sinclair himself—could ever penetrate the veil of mystery with which Jackson surrounded his favourite. Whether Goblin was doing well or ill was a secret which Jackson kept locked within his own breast. When Jackson looked gloomy, the underlings of the stable concluded that Goblin was 'off his feed,' or that Goblin was 'up to nought.'

When it came to a trial, Mr. Jackson shrank from the contest; and when compelled to run his *protégé* against the best horse in the stable, secretly weighted Goblin in such a manner as to insure his being ignominiously beaten.

Goblin kept none of his two-year-old engagements, though Mr. Jackson went so far as to admit

by this time that the colt was no more lame than he was. 'But I ain't going to let him fritter away his strength in two-year old races,' said Mr. Jackson, decisively. 'I ain't forgot Bonnie Dundee.'

Gilbert Sinclair submitted unwillingly, being at this time very low down in his luck as a racing man, and anxious for any success which might in somewise redeem his position.

Now came spring—violets and primroses; woodlands white with chestnut bloom and hawthorn; nightingales warbling their vesper love-songs, and—much more important to gentlemen of Mr. Sinclair's class—the Two Thousand Guineas. And now Goblin came forward to perform his first important engagement as a three-year old, and Gilbert Sincalir was richly rewarded for his patience.

Goblin—a horse entirely unknown to the racing public—came in an easy winner; and Gilbert, who had taken his trainer's advice, and had backed his horse to the utmost of his capacity, won a small fortune, as well as feeling pretty sure about his expectations for the Derby.

It was the first great success Gilbert Sinclair had

ever scored upon the turf, and he left Newmarket that night almost light-headed with excitement. Things had been going much better with him since January. The men had gone back to their work in the grimy north. Indian steamers were using Mr. Sinclair's coal as fast as he could produce it. The golden tide was flowing into his exchequer again, and his banker's book no longer presented a dismal blank upon its left-hand pages. This success at Newmarket was the crowning mercy. He felt himself a rich man once more, and laughed to scorn the notion of surrendering Davenant at Midsummer. Wyatt had bought and paid for the estate, but of course would be glad to sell it again at a profit.

The scheme for Constance Sinclair's restoration had prospered wonderfully. Health and strength had returned, and with these the clear light of reason. She had never doubted the identity of the little girl Lord Clanyarde brought her that winter evening with the child she had lost.

She had readily accepted the story—a somewhat lame one—of the child's rescue by some kind German peasants, who had brought it over to England, where,

by a curious chain of circumstances, Lord Clanyarde had come to know of its existence. The little girl was known to the whole household as Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair's own child. There would be time enough by and by to reveal the imposture. Even Martha Briggs—little Christabel's devoted nurse—had never suspected the trick that had been played upon her mistress. The only member of the household who had shown any particular curiosity, or desire to know the ins and outs of this business, was Melanie Duport. That young woman had asked as many questions as she could venture to put, and had appeared somewhat mystified by the course of events.

So there had been peace at Davenant during the early spring. Constance had been quietly happy in the little girl's society, and in those joys which the convalescent feels when a world that has been darkened to the wandering mind reappears in all its light and beauty. Never had the woods and fields, the blue April sky and shining river, seemed so lovely in the eyes of Constance Sinclair as they appeared this year. Her love of music, of art, of all bright

things, seemed intensified by that awful season of darkness, in which these delights had been blotted from her mind.

Her husband was tolerably kind to her, but spent much of his time away from Davenant, and did not trouble her repose by filling the house with his rackety companions.

Mr. Wyatt came now and then for a day or two, but he was the only guest during this tranquil spring-time.

Thus stood matters early in May, when Goblin won the Two Thousand Guineas, and in the trainer's phraseology, brought his owner 'a pot of money.'

Gilbert went up to London an hour after the race, with his 'pot of money,' or, at any rate, some portion of it, in his pocket. The rest would be paid up at Tattersall's in due course. He had eaten nothing that day, having been too anxious about the result of the race to eat any breakfast, and too much elated by his triumph to eat any dinner. He had therefore been compelled to sustain nature upon brandy and soda, which is not exactly a sedative for a man of hot temper. He talked

about Goblin and his own cleverness in getting hold of Goblin all the way up to London, and arrived at Shoreditch with his pulse galloping and his blood at fever heat.

'I'm not going to let that quill-driving cad have Davenant now,' he said to himself. 'This race brings me in something like twenty thou', and I shall "pot" as much more over the Derby.'

He called a hansom, and told the man to drive to Bloomsbury Square, intending to honour Mr. Wyatt, otherwise 'that quill-driving cad,' with a call. The cab rattled through the City streets, all shining in the setting sun, which was fading redly on the westward-facing windows of the grave old square when Gilbert alighted at Mr. Wyatt's door.

It was a fine old house which the solicitor occupied, one of the oldest and largest in the square, and there had been no attempt to disfigure a house in which Steele and his companions may have hob-nobbed over the midnight bottle, with such modern improvements as stucco without and gas within.

A respectable-looking man-servant, out of livery,

admitted Mr. Sinclair into a square hall, oak-panelled and paved with black and white marble. The doors were oak, deeply set in the solid old walls, the architraves handsome enough for a modern palace. An old-fashioned oil lamp had just been lighted, and shed a sickly yellow light on some of the panels, while others reflected the crimson glow in the west, as if they had been splashed with blood.

'Your master at home?' asked Gilbert.

'Yes, sir. He has just dined. Shall I show you into the dining-room?'

'Yes, and you can bring me something to eat, Staples,' replied Gilbert, who was quite at home in his solicitor's house.

He went into the dining-room without giving the man time to announce him. James Wyatt sat in a lounging attitude facing the western sun, with a claret jug and an untouched dessert before him on the small oval table. That snug oval table of pollard oak had superseded the ponderous old mahogany twenty-two feet by six at which Mr. Wyatt's father and grandfather had been wont to entertain

their friends. James Wyatt wanted no twenty-two foot table, for he never gave large parties. Cosy quartettes, or even confidential tête-à-tête banquets were more to his liking, and he gave as elaborate and careful a dinner to a man who dined with him alone as other men provide for a gathering that includes all the magnates of their circle. Were pollard oak gifted with speech, that oval board could have told many a thrilling tale of thirty per cent. which had been made, in the initiative stage, to seem only seven: of clients in the City who had money to lend, and were so good-natured about lending it, on a safe mortgage or otherwise: and of that awful hour in which the same good easy-going clients assumed quite another character, and were determined to foreclose, or to get their money back by hook or by crook, with a savage disregard of the borrower's feelings. But happily for the maintenance of the decencies, modern oaks do not claim to be oracular. Mr. Wyatt's table was not loquacious; and the grave old room, with a few fine pictures on the oak panelling, and some valuable bronzes on the tall chimney-piece, looked respectable enough to

inspire confidence in the most cautious mind. If the pictures had been daubs, or the furniture gaudy, the effect would have been different. But the pictures looked like heirlooms, and the furniture told of a chastened taste, and a refinement that implied virtue and honour in the possessor thereof.

'Back already?' exclaimed Mr. Wyatt. 'How did Goblin go? Got a place?'

'Won in a canter,' answered Gilbert, flinging himself into a chair, and wiping his damp forehead. 'Never saw such a horse. There's nothing to beat him. I was right about him, you see.'

'Jackson was right about him, you mean. Have some dinner,' said Mr. Wyatt, ringing the bell.

'Thanks, I've ordered some. I don't stand upon punctilio with you, you see.'

'I should be very sorry if you did. Well, you've made a heap of money, I suppose?'

'Yes, it's a pretty good haul. Jackson raved like a lunatic about the horse. I was to put on every sixpence I had. I told the fellow I should be ruined

if Goblin lost. "He won't lose," raved Jackson, dancing about like a maniac. "You don't know what that hoss can do. I tried him last March against Lord Wildair's Cowcumber, and put a hextra seven pound on him, and Cowcumber was nowhere. I felt sorry I hadn't made it fourteen pound, when I saw that blessed Cowcumber regular pumped." I was bound to believe in the horse after that, wasn't I?'

'Yes, if you could believe in the trainer.'

'Well, the result has shown that he told me the truth. Oh, here comes the dinner.'

Gilbert made a weak attempt to eat some fish and a still weaker attempt at a plate of lamb, but failed in both efforts.

'I've no appetite,' he said. 'You'd better give me a brandy and soda.'

'How many brandies and sodas have you had to-day?" asked Wyatt, with an air of friendly anxiety, that tone of an easy-going mentor which long use had made natural to him.

If James Wyatt's clients went to the dogs, their ruin could never be laid at his door. He gave them

such good advice upon the way, and parted with them with a friendly shake hands at the last, just before the dogs eat them.

'Do you suppose I counted them?' demanded Gilbert, with a laugh. 'The sun was hot, and I was excited about Goblin. I had a pocket full of silver, and it's all gone, and I don't think I've paid for anything except brandy and soda. That's a rough way of calculating.'

'You've been drinking too much brandy, Gilbert.'

'That's my look out.'

'Try some of that claret.'

'I'll have brandy or nothing.'

Mr. Wyatt sighed, and rang the bell, and then filled a large cool-looking glass with the Lafitte, which he sipped in a calmly appreciative manner, with the air of a man who had never been thirsty in his life.

'Yes, Jim,' began Gilbert, harking back, 'I've made a tidy haul to-day, and I expect a bigger haul on Wednesday fortnight. And now, old fellow, I want you to do me a favour.'

'Find a good investment for your winnings?

With pleasure. I can get you a safe seven per cent.'

'Thanks, that's not the favour I mean. Ah, here's the stuff,' as the man brought in a spirit stand and a supply of soda water. 'I want you to let me have Davenant back, Jim,' pouring brandy into a tall tumbler without looking at the quantity. 'You can't want the place for yourself, you know?'

'Why not?'

'Well, my dear boy,' replied Mr. Sinclair, with the amiable candour which is sometimes induced by alcohol, 'you're not the sort of man to play the country gentleman. You wouldn't find it pay. You may stop, you may shut up the shop if you will, but the odour of sixty per cent. will hang round you still. You understand, old fellow. The county people wouldn't associate with you. They come to me, you know, for my wife's sake; that's a different thing. They wouldn't cotton to you. They're very fond of borrowing money, but they don't like money-lenders. You'd find county society a dead letter, dear boy; and it would be folly to keep up such a place as Davenant for the reception of a pack of young fools

from London. You can pluck such pigeons anywhere.'

"How kind of you to be so interested in my business.'

'Nothing like candour between friends,' said Gilbert.

'And you want me to sell you Davenant? That's curious. You were red hot to get rid of the place a few months ago.'

'I was down on my luck just then. Things have changed for the better. And I find that I care more for the place than I thought I did. And I shouldn't particularly like my neighbours to crow over me. It would look as if I were ruined if I parted with such a place as that.'

'What a complete change of tone! I suppose your wife's recovery has caused this alteration in your feelings?'

Gilbert winced. It always stung him when James Wyatt spoke of his wife. The man's tone implied some occult knowledge. Speak as courteously as he might, there was always a lurking sneer.

'Come, Jim, I'll give you a handsome profit on

your bargain. What more can you want? Name your own terms. I know you only bought the place as a speculation.'

'Suppose I did, and that the speculation has answered. How then?'

'You mean that you have sold it again?'

'Within four and twenty hours of my purchase.'

'By Jove, that's sharp work,' cried Gilbert, bitterly disappointed. 'But perhaps the man who bought it would take a profit on his purchase.'

'Not much chance of that. The man who bought it would have given me almost any money for the place, if I had been inclined to take advantage of his eagerness to get it back again.'

'Back again!' cried Gilbert, starting up with a vehemence that sent the soda water bottles spinning across the table. 'To get it back again! Then you've sold it to Sir Cyprian Davenant!'

'That's the man,' answered Wyatt, opening his cigar-case, and affecting an extreme deliberation in the choice of a cigar.

'Jim Wyatt, you're a scoundrel,' roared Sinclair.

'That's strong, and actionable into the bargain.

Don't be a fool, Sinclair. You want to turn your estate into money. I give you the money you want, and take my property to the best market. Where is the wrong?'

'Where is the wrong? You duped, you hoodwinked me. You know how I hate that man. You know that I would rather cut my throat than give him any advantage. You know, or you ought to know, that my chief motive in buying Davenant was to humiliate him, to give my wife the place he might have given her, to show her which was the better man of the two, to set my heel upon Sir Cyprian Davenant. And you swindle me out of my revenge, —you put the winning card into my enemy's hand. You, my professed friend, — you, who have made thousands out of me.'

'I grant the thousands,' answered Wyatt, looking up, and facing his accuser with a sparkle of defiance in his small gray eyes. 'People who want dirty work done must pay a good price for it. But as for friendship, please remember that I have never made any professions on that score. When have you ever treated *me* like a friend, Gilbert Sinclair, or like an

equal? When have you descended from the lofty standpoint of your coalpits and your smelting works to my level? Not once. And you think because you have made a social door-mat of me—because you have let me fetch and carry, and honoured me with your confidence when you wanted to air your grievances, or get out of a difficulty—because, in one word, I have been useful, you think I am to call you my friend, and sacrifice my own interests in order to gratify your spite. You wanted to get rid of Davenant; I took it off your hands, and made a profit by the transaction. You don't suppose I would speculate five and thirty thousand to oblige you.'

'Judas!' cried Gilbert Sinclair, seizing his quondam friend by the throat.

The soberer and calmer man had the better of mere brute force. James Wyatt shook off his assailant as easily as if he had been the athlete, and Gilbert the thinker and plotter.

'Fool,' he exclaimed, contemptuously. 'Don't waste your breath in upbraiding *me* with treachery. Look at home. Look to your own house and your

pretty wife, who recovered her senses so quickly under the influence of her German physician. Have you had many visits from that German physician, Mr. Sinclair? Perhaps he times his visits so as to avoid meeting you. You spend a good deal of your life away from Davenant, you see.'

'What do you mean?' gasped the other.

'What I say. Look at home for treachery. I gave you a hint the night our German friend first came to your house, but you were too dull to take advantage of it.'

Gilbert started, and looked at him intently.

'I remember what you said—"Watch your wife." I did watch her. What then?'

'You saw how he—the strange doctor—could awaken intelligence which no one else could rouse. You saw how she sang at his bidding—how her tears flowed—for him. A case of electro-biology, one would suppose.

'Wyatt, I shall strangle you if you don't put your meaning into the very plainest words!'

'And perhaps strangle me if I do. I must risk that, I suppose,' said Mr. Wyatt, with a laugh.

'Plainly, then, you should have made better use of your eyes that night, and seen through the disguise of a pair of smoke-coloured spectacles, and a gray wig and beard. The man who came to your house with Lord Clanyarde was Sir Cyprian Davenant.'

'It's a lie!' cried Gilbert Sinclair.

'It's as true as that your wife's recovery dates from the hour of his visit.'

'You knew this—you—my legal adviser—friend—and you sold my estate to that man—knowing this!' cried Sinclair, almost inarticulate with passion.

'Again I must repeat that I never professed to be your friend. As your legal adviser I had no right to interfere in your domestic affairs. As to the sale of the property, I cannot see how that affects your position with Sir Cyprian.'

If Gilbert could have flown at the man's throat again, and strangled him, there might have been some satisfaction in that act of savagery. To call him bad names—and to see his sardonic grin as he heard them, was a poor relief—but it was all that civilization allowed. Gilbert hurled some of the

hardest epithets in the vocabulary of abuse at that smiling traitor, and then flung himself out of the room and out of the house.

The hansom was waiting for him—meekly as your most spirited hansom will wait on a balmy evening for a safe customer. The young May moon was up in the soft opal sky.

'Charing Cross Station—double fare,' cried Mr. Sinclair, and the cab-horse enlivened the shades of quiet Bloomsbury by the clatter of his poor chipped hoofs upon the macadamized road.

* * * * * *

James Wyatt paced his room in the darkening shadows, deep in thought. He had sent a poisoned barb to the heart of the man he hated, and he was glad. There was not a petty slight of days gone by, not a small insolence for which he had not paid himself handsomely by to-night's work—but it was not to avenge the millionaire's petty slights and small insolences, not to uplift the wounded crest of his own self-esteem, viper-like, that he had stung his enemy. His hatred of Gilbert Sinclair had a deeper root than wounded pride. Disappointed

love was its source. But for Gilbert Sinclair he might have been loved by the one woman whose regard he valued. Clara Walsingham's constancy to her old lover was the offence that made Gilbert loathsome to his quondam friend—and it was to gratify his own jealousy that Wyatt had aroused the demon of jealousy in his rival's breast.

'He shall know the flavour of the anguish he has caused me,' thought Wyatt, 'if his coarse soul can suffer as I have suffered for a woman's sake. Whether his wife is guilty or innocent matters nothing to me. The pain will be *his*. If he were man enough to blow his brains out, now, there might be a chance for me with Clara. So long as he lives she will cling to the hope of winning him back. Where is she hiding, I wonder, and what is her scheme of life, while I am wearing my soul out for her sake?'

Mr. Wyatt had not seen Mrs. Walsingham since that interview in which she had refused to keep faith with him, flinging her promise to the winds. He had gone to Half-moon Street on the following Saturday evening, determined to make peace with

her at any sacrifice of his own dignity, with the slavish pertinacity of a man who passionately loves. He had driven up to the door, expecting to see the lighted windows shining out on the wintry street—to hear Herr Klavierschlager pounding the Erard, and the hum and twitter of many voices, as he went up the narrow flower-scented staircase ; but to his surprise the windows were all dark, and a sleepy little maid-servant came to the door with a guttering tallow candle, and informed him that Mrs. Walsingham had gone abroad, the maid-servant knew not whither.

'Was there no direction left for forwarding letters?' asked Mr. Wyatt.

'No, sir, not as I knows of. The hagent, praps, wot has the lettin' of the 'ouse might know.'

Mr. Wyatt hunted out the house-agent on Monday morning, but that useful member of society had received no information about Mrs. Walsingham's destination, whether she meant to travel or to be stationary. He was to let her house to a good tenant, and to communicate with her through her solicitor.

Mr. Wyatt went to the solicitor, who politely refused to give his client's address.

'Perhaps she has gone into a convent,' thought James Wyatt, at his wits' end; and his disappointment added not a little to the bitterness of his feelings towards that profitable client of his, Gilbert Sinclair.

. . . . . .

Staples, the butler, came in with the lamps, shut the solid old oak shutters, cleared the table, and brought his master a cup of coffee, all in an orderly and respectable manner that was well worth his sixty pounds a year. Mr. Wyatt was a man who would not have kept a bad servant a week, and who never parted with a good one.

The postman's knock sounded on the ponderous door, while Mr. Wyatt was sipping his coffee, and Staples came in with a salver-full of letters.

James Wyatt spread them out before him thoughtfully, as if they were cards, and he were calculating their value. Handsome creamy envelopes, thick and aristocratic, with armorial bearings on the seals; others blue and business-like, and unpretendingly

inexpressive. One narrow little envelope, thin, green, and shiny. This was the first he opened.

The letter it contained was written in a small scratching hand, unmistakably foreign, little curly tails to all the d's, a general scragginess in the y's, a paucity of capitals.

'Why do you not let me see you, or write to me? Is it not that it is cruel, after so much of promises? You leave me to languish, without the hope. Dream you that I shall content to be servant for always, after what you have promised? But do not believe it. I have too much spirit. It must that I talk to you of all that at leisure, the eyes in the eyes, that I may see if you are true, if you have of good intentions to my regard. Write me, and very quickly, my friend, it must that I have of your news.—Always your

'MELANIE.'

'This comes of an innocent flirtation—pour passer le temps—in a stupid country house,' said Mr. Wyatt, crumpling the letter savagely. 'This girl will worry my life out. I was a fool to amuse myself with such a dangerous little viper. And

if I were to be frank with her, and tell her to go about her business, she might make matters unpleasant for me. The law comes down rather heavily on anything in the shape of conspiracy; and our little affair at Schönesthal might be made to assume that complexion. And the law never comes down so heavily as when it gets its hoof on a victim with plenty to lose. Your British jury, too, has no liking for a man who turns his superfluous capital to good account by lending it to fools. No, I must keep that Schönesthal business out of the law courts at any cost. Melanie must be pensioned, and sent back to her native valley, or her native slum—for I should think such an artful young person must have been born in some festering city alley rather than among vineyards or orchards.'

Mr. Wyatt went to his writing table and answered Mademoiselle Duport's letter without delay—briefly and cautiously.

## CHAPTER II.

### GILBERT ASKS A QUESTION.

If Lord Clanyarde had been within easy reach, Gilbert Sinclair would have gone straightway to upbraid him with his treachery in bringing Sir Cyprian to Davenant disguised and in a false name; but Lord Clanyarde, finding himself at fifty years of age entirely unfettered by domestic encumbrances, was indulging his natural frivolity among a more agreeable people than his serious and business-like fellow-countrymen. Lord Clanyarde was eating ices and playing dominoes under the colonnades of Venice, with thoughts of moving to Tyrolean mountains when the weather grew too warm in the sea-girt city.

So Gilbert, not being able to get at Lord Clanyarde, nursed his wrath to keep it warm, and went straight home to Davenant Park, where Constance was leading her calm and happy life, seeing hardly

anything of what the world calls "society," but surrounded by the people she had known since her childhood—the good old rector, who had christened her; the devoted little doctor, who had watched her so patiently when her dull eyes had hardly recognized his familiar face; the schoolmistress, the old pupils, the gray old gardeners, and sunburnt gamekeepers; the gaffers and goodies who had been old when she was a baby, and seemed hardly any older for the twenty years that had passed over their heads since then. Cheeks a little more shrivelled perhaps; brows more deeply wrinkled; shoulders a trifle more bent; but exactly the same appreciation of tea and tobacco, half-crowns and new neckerchiefs, the Psalms and the Rector's sermons.

Never had spring seemed to her so beautiful as it seemed this year, when she led her little girl through the woods and showed her the newly-awakened flowers, and told her the names of the birds that poured out such gushing songs of gladness in the warm bright noon. The child's lips began to shape isolated words,—mam—mam, and

birdie, fowers, for flowers—Divine language, to the mother's ear. Never was child happier or more fondly loved. Martha Briggs, nothing doubting, hugged this little waif to her honest heart; and even Melanie, who had a curious inward revulsion from the child, felt herself constrained to pretend the deepest gratitude to Providence for the little one's restoration. Once, inspired by some familiar spirit of evil, she could not resist dropping a little poison into her mistress's cup of joy.

'Do you feel quite sure there has been no mistake, ma'am?' she asked. 'I sometimes fancy our darling could not have been saved. I saw her carried away by the current, carried past me like a straw, and it has never been quite explained how she was rescued.'

Constance looked at the girl with eyes on fire with indignation.

'Am I sure that this is my child?' she cried, clasping the baby to her breast. 'Am I sure of my own name, of my life? If all the rest of the world were a dream or a shadow, I should know

that Christabel was real and true. Who can deceive a mother?'

'You were so ill when the little girl was brought home,' suggested Melanie, with an air of conscientious doubt.

'Not too ill to remember my Christabel. We knew each other, did we not, darling? Our lips clung together as if we had never been parted. Not know my own child, indeed! Never dare to make such a suggestion again, Melanie.'

After this Mademoiselle Duport was discreetly silent on the subject of this present Christabel's identity with the Christabel of the past; but the time was to come when Constance Sinclair's faith was to receive a ruder shock.

Gilbert went home that evening after the Two Thousand, with his mind full of scorpions. Goblin's success was as nothing to him. He hardly remembered that one of his horses had won a great race, for the first time since he had kept horses. He had counted on James Wyatt's fidelity just as he had counted on his horse or his dog, a creature bought with his money, fed and housed by him.

Wyatt had profited by him; Wyatt was bound to stand by him; and as to those various slights which he had put upon his confidential adviser at divers times, almost unconsciously, it had never occurred to him that there could be any galling wound left by such small stings, the venom whereof was to react upon himself.

If he had heaped favours upon the man, if he had been the most unselfish and devoted of friends, he could not have felt James Wyatt's treachery more keenly. He was angry with himself for having been so easy a dupe, for having given any man power to get the better of him.

'The whole thing is a planned revenge,' he thought, 'Wyatt knew how it would gall me to see Sir Cyprian back at Davenant?'

And Wyatt had flung a firebrand in that revelation about the pretended German doctor. Could it be, Gilbert asked himself, or was it a malicious invention of Wyatt's? Would Lord Clanyarde have lent himself to such a deception? Surely not. But even Lord Clanyarde might have been hoodwinked by his daughter's lover.

'I won't accuse her—not yet awhile," he said to himself. 'It will be better to keep quiet and watch. I have been too often away. I have given her too much license. That innocent face of her's would deceive Satan himself. And I have allowed myself to think that there was no guile in her; that although she has never loved me, she has never wronged me. Hard to find after all that I have judged her too leniently.'

It was after midnight when Mr. Sinclair arrived at Davenant, and he had to ring up one of the servants to let him in, his return being altogether unlooked for. He did not see Constance until the next day, and by this time he had regained the mastery of himself. The position of affairs between husband and wife since Mrs. Sinclair's recovery had been a kind of armed neutrality. Gilbert had never alluded to that awful day on which he had raised his hand against his wife, nor had Constance. Doubtful whether she remembered that unhappy occurrence, and deeply ashamed of the brutality into which passion had betrayed him, Mr. Sinclair wisely kept his own counsel. To apologise might be to

make a revelation. His remorse showed itself by increased civility to his wife, and a new deference to her feelings, for which she was duly grateful. Gentle, submissive always, she gave her husband no cause of offence, save that one rankling sore which had begun to gall him directly the triumphant sense of possession had lost its power to satisfy—the consciousness that he had never won her heart. This smouldering fire needed but a spark of jealousy to raise a fatal flame.

Constance expressed herself much pleased at Goblin's success, when Gilbert announced the fact, with very little elation, on the day after the race. They were dining together *tête-à-tête*, in the spacious panelled room, which seemed so much too big for them. These ceremonious late dinners were Constance's aversion. In her husband's absence she dined early, with Christabel, and spent the long afternoons walking or driving, and came home at twilight to a social tea party with Martha Briggs and Baby.

'I didn't think you cared about race-horses,' said Gilbert, as if doubting the sincerity of his wife's congratulations.

'Not in the abstract, they are such far-off creatures. One never gets on intimate terms with them. They are like the strange animals which the Emperor Commodus brought to Rome, mere articles of luxury. But I am very glad your horse has won, Gilbert, on your account.'

'Yes, it's a great triumph for me. If I can win the Derby I shall be satisfied. Racing is confoundedly expensive, and I've had quite enough of it. I think I shall sell Goblin and the whole stud after Epsom, and the new stables into the bargain, and then I shall improve that great barrack of a place in the north, and settle down. I'm sick of this part of the world. It's too d——d civilized,' added Mr. Sinclair forcibly.

'Do you mean that you would leave Davenant?' asked Constance, with astonishment.

'Yes. I ought to have told you, by the way. Davenant ceases to be mine after Midsummer Day. I've sold it.'

'Sold Davenant!'

'Yes. I have never really cared for the place, and I had a good offer for it while you were ill.

Things were not looking very lively in the north just then, and I was in want of money. I dare say you'll be pleased, when you hear who is the purchaser,' added Gilbert, with an uncomfortable smile.

Constance seemed hardly to hear the latter part of his speech.

'To think that you should have sold Davenant—the dear old place.'

'I thought you did not care for it.'

'Not just at first, perhaps. It seemed too big for me. I liked shabby old Marchbrook better. But I have been so happy here, lately, and it is so nice to live amongst people one has known all one's life.'

'Yes, old associations are sweet,' sneered Gilbert, the demon Jealousy getting the upper hand.

'But, after all, the place itself matters very little," said Constance, anxious to avoid anything that might seem like upbraiding. No wife so conscientious in the discharge of her duty as a good woman who does not love her husband. 'I should be just as happy in any cottage in the neighbourhood.'

'Especially if you had an old friend settled here,' said Gilbert. 'You haven't asked me the name of my successor. But perhaps you know.'

'How should I know?'

'You might have means of obtaining information.'

'Who is the person, Gilbert?'

'Sir Cyprian Davenant.'

He watched her closely. Was the announcement a surprise, or did she know all about it, and was that look of grave astonishment a touch of social comedy?

She looked at him earnestly for a minute, and grew somewhat paler, he thought, as if the very sound of his rival's name were a shock to her.

'Indeed! He has bought the old place again,' she said, quietly. 'That seems only right. But I thought he had gone back to Africa.'

'Did you really?' said Gilbert, with a somewhat ironical elevation of his eyebrows. 'Well, I thought so too. But it seems he is still in England. Oh, by-the-by, do you remember that German doctor who came to see you when you were ill?'

There was a purpose in the abruptness of this question. He wanted to take her off her guard;—if possible, to startle her into betraying herself. If there were any truth in Wyatt's assertion this question must be a startling one.

Her calm look told him nothing. She was either innocent of all guile or the most consummate hypocrite.

'Yes, I can faintly remember. I can just recall that night, like a dream. I remember papa and you coming into my room, and a curious-looking old man, with a kind voice—a voice that went to my heart, somehow.'

Gilbert started, and frowned.

'Yes, I remember,' pursued Constance. 'It seems like a picture as I look back; your anxious looks; the firelight shining on your faces. He asked me to sing, did he not? Yes, and the song made me cry. Oh, such blessed tears—they took a load off my mind. It was like the loosening of a band of iron round my head. And he spoke to me about Christabel, and told me to hope. Dear old man, I have reason to remember him.'

'Has he never been since?'

'Never. How should he come unless you or papa brought him?'

"No, to be sure. And you have no curiosity about him—no desire to see him again?'

'Why should I be curious or anxious? He did not deceive me with false hope. My darling was restored to me.'

'And you thank him for that?'

'I thank God for having saved my child. I thank that good old doctor for being the first to tell me to hope.'

This much and no more could Gilbert's closest questioning extort from his wife. What was he to think—that Wyatt was fooling him, or that Constance was past-mistress in dissimulation? He did not know what to think, and was miserable accordingly.

## CHAPTER III.

### READY FOR THE WORST.

JUNE roses were opening in the flower garden at Davenant, and Gilbert Sinclair had been leading a life of the purest domesticity for the last three weeks. It hung rather heavily upon him, that domestic life, for though he loved his wife after his own fashion, he was not fond of home-joys or exclusively feminine society. But what will not a jealous man endure when once his suspicions are aroused? Patient as the spider watching his prey, he waits for the unguarded moment which shall betray the horrid secret he fears yet longs to discover.

> 'La faiblesse humaine est d'avoir
> Des curiosités d'apprendre
> Ce qu'on ne voudrait pas savoir.'

Except to see Goblin win the Derby—a feat which that estimable animal performed with honour to himself and satisfaction to every one save the

bookmen—Gilbert had not been away from Davenant since the Two Thousand. He had been told to look for treachery at home, and he was on the spot, ready to seize the traitor. No *mouchard* in the secret service of the Parisian police was ever a closer spy than the husband who doubts, yet doats, suspects, yet fondly loves.

That he had seen nothing in all this time to confirm his doubts was not enough to convince Mr. Sinclair that those doubts were baseless. He was willing to imagine profoundest hypocrisy in the wife of his bosom, a brazen front under the semblance of a pure and innocent brow. Even her devotion to her child might be a cover for a guiltier love. Her happiness, her tranquillity, gave him new ground for suspicion. Was there not some secret well-spring of contentment, some hidden source of delight masked behind this fair show of maternal affection?

These were the questions which Gilbert Sinclair was perpetually revolving in his mind during the period of domestic bliss, and this was the aspect of affairs up to the sixteenth of June. Ascot races were

to begin on the sixteenth, and on the seventeenth Goblin was to fulfil his third great engagement. This was an occasion before which even a husband's jealous fears must give way; and Gilbert had made up his mind to see the horse run. He had not carried out his idea of selling Goblin after the Derby. Jackson, the trainer, had protested vehemently against such a breach of faith with *him*, who had made the horse.

'That there 'oss is to win the Ledger,' said the indignant Jackson. 'If he don't, I'll eat him, pigskin and all.'

Gilbert felt that to part with such a horse, for ever so high a price, would be to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs.

'A horse can't go on winning great races for ever, though. There must come a turn in the tide,' suggested Gilbert, sagely. 'We should get a pot of money for him now.'

'A gentleman couldn't sell a 'oss that had just won him the blue ribbon of the turf,' replied Jackson, with a burst of chivalrous feeling. 'It would be too mean.'

Gilbert submitted to be governed by the finer feeling of his trainer, and took no step towards cutting short his career on the turf. Things were looking livelier in the coalpit district, he told himself, and a few thousand a year more or less could not hurt him. He would carry out his original idea, take a place somewhere near Newmarket, and establish his wife and—the child there.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have taken a house at Ascot during the race week, for the accommodation of himself and a selection of choice spirits with sporting tastes—where the nights might have been enlivened by blind hookey, or poker, or some equally enlightening recreation. But on this occasion Mr. Sinclair made no such comfortable arrangement, and determined to sleep at his hotel in town on the night after the great race.

He was smoking his after-dinner cigar on the evening of the sixteenth, pacing slowly up and down the terrace in front of the open drawing-room windows, when a servant brought him his letters.

The first he opened was from his trainer, who was in high spirits about Goblin. The next two or three were business letters of no importance. The last was in a strange hand, a niggling, scratchy little hand, which, if there be any expression in penmanship, was suggestive of a mean and crafty nature in the writer.

Gilbert tore open the envelope, expecting to find some insinuating 'tip' from a gentleman of the genus 'tout.' But the letter was not even so honest as a tip. It was that snake in the grass, an anonymous warning.

'If Mr. Sinclaire is away to-moro nite he will mis an oportunitie to learn sumthing he ouht to kno. If he wants to kno a secret let im wattch the balcone of is wif's room betwin tenn and leven to-moro nite,—a frend.'

Such a letter falling into the hands of a generous-minded man would have aroused only contempt—but coming to a man who had given himself up as a prey to suspicion and jealousy, who had long been on the watch for domestic treachery, even this venomous scrawl became significant as the

voice of Fate—an oracle to be obeyed at any cost.

'She has taken advantage of my intended absence already, and has made an appointment with her lover,' thought Gilbert Sinclair. 'This warning comes from one of my servants, I dare say—some scullery-maid, who has found out my wife's infamy, and pities the deluded husband. Rather hard to swallow pity from such a quarter.'

Then came the natural reaction.

'Is it a hoax, I wonder? A trick played upon me by some dismissed underling? Yet, how should any one know how to put his finger on the spot that galls? Unless it were that scoundrel Wyatt, who hates me like poison. Well, at the least, I can take the hint, and be on the watch. God help Cyprian Davenant if he crosses my threshold with evil intent! He may have deceived me once. He shan't deceive me again.'

Mr. Sinclair went to Ascot next day as he had intended. Any change in his plans would have put his wife upon her guard. He went to the races, looking uncommonly glum, as his friends politely

informed him. So gloomy, indeed, were his looks that some of his intimates made haste to hedge their bets about Goblin, making very sure that the Derby winner had been seized by some sudden indisposition. The event rewarded their caution, for Goblin, although brought up to the starting post in magnificent condition, failed to get a place. Gilbert bore his disappointment with supreme stoicism. Goblin's victory would not have made him smile, his failure hardly touched him. It was provoking, of course; but Destiny and Mr. Sinclair had long been at odds. This was another item added to an old account.

He drove to the station directly Goblin's race was over, and as there was another race to come he got a place in the train easily. It started immediately, and he was in London before seven o'clock, and on his way to Davenant at eight. He had not stopped to dine. A biscuit and a glass of brandy and soda were all he cared to take in his present frame of mind.

It was striking nine as he left the quiet little Kentish station, not quite clear as to what his next

step ought to be. He had been told to watch his wife's room between ten and eleven. To do this with any effect he must get into the house unobserved, or find a safe post of observation in the garden. To announce his return home would be, of course, to destroy his chance of making any discovery; and by this time he had made up his mind that there was domestic treachery to be discovered. As to the means he cared little, or nothing. To meet treachery with treachery could be no dishonour.

It was dusk, the sweet summer dusk, when he entered the park, through a gate seldom used by any one but gamekeepers or servants. The nightingales were breaking out into sudden gushes of melody, calling and answering one another from distant clumps of chesnut or beech, but Mr. Sinclair took no heed of the nightingales. In his happiest frame of mind that melodious jug-jugging would have made no particular impression upon his unsensitive ear—to-night all senses were more or less in abeyance. He found his way along the narrow footpath mechanically, looking neither to the right nor the left,

and only roused himself when he came within sight of the house.

How to get in unobserved and reach his room without meeting any of the servants was the question.

A moment's reflection showed him that this ought to be easy enough. Half-past nine o'clock was the servants' supper hour at Davenant; and meals in the servants' hall are an institution which even domestic convulsions leave unshaken. A funeral makes no difference in the divine right of servants to dine and sup at a certain hour: a wedding may cause some supererogatory feasting, but can hardly overthrow the regular order of the daily meals. Mr. Sinclair had no fear therefore of any alteration in the routine of the household; and he knew by experience that his servants liked to take their time at the social evening meal.

It was twenty minutes to ten when he stopped for a minute or so in the shrubbery to consider his plans. Between ten and eleven, said the anonymous letter. He had no time to lose.

He skirted the lawn in front of the drawing-room windows, keeping in the shadow of the trees. The

windows were all open. Lamps were burning on the tables, candles on the open piano, but his wife was not there. He went in at one of the windows. The child's toys were lying on the floor by Constance's favourite chair. An open work basket, and a little pile of books on a gipsy table, showed that the room had been lately occupied.

'She has gone to the balcony room, to keep her appointment,' he thought, savagely; for by this time he had accepted the anonymous warning as a truth.

The hall was as empty as the drawing-room. The lamps burned dimly, being the last invention in lamps that do not illuminate. Gilbert went softly up the shallow old staircase to the corridor which ran the length of the house, and ended at the door of his own snuggery. He reached this door without meeting any one, went quietly into the room, and locked the door. The oriel window of this room commanded the balcony room, which was recessed in the southern front, between two projecting wings. There could be no better post of observation for the man who had been told to watch the garden approach to his wife's rooms.

There were matches and candles on the mantelpiece, but to strike a light would be to make his presence known to any one in the balcony room, so Gilbert waited quietly in the half darkness of a summer night, and found what he wanted easily enough by the sense of touch. There was no moon yet, but a few stars were shining faintly in the calm grey sky. The windows of the balcony room were dark, and one stood open—the one nearest the iron stair. Gilbert observed this.

'She is sitting there in the dark,' he thought, 'waiting for him. That dark room, that open window look like guilt. Why has she not her lamp lighted, and her music or her books? No, she has something else to think of.'

His guns were arranged in artistic order above the chimney-piece—a costly collection, with all the latest improvements in sporting guns. His hands wandered here and there among the stocks till they came to a favourite rifle, the lightest in his collection, and one of the surest. He had shot many a royal stag with it beyond the Tweed. He took down this gun, went to a drawer where he kept ammunition, and selected

his cartridge, and loaded his gun in a steady, business-like manner. There was no faltering of the hand that dropped the cartridge into its place, though that hand meant murder.

'He refused to fight me,' Gilbert Sinclair said to himself. 'He lied to me until I was fool enough to believe his lies. I gave him fair warning. He has tricked and insulted me in the face of that warning. He has entered my house once as an impostor and a liar. If he tries to enter it a second time as a thief and a seducer, his blood be upon his own head.'

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

## CHAPTER IV.

### CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.

TEN o'clock struck with sweet and solemn chime from the square tower of the parish church as Gilbert Sinclair opened the lattice, and stood by the window of his dressing-room, waiting. There was not a leaf stirring in the garden, not a shadow save the motionless shadows of the trees. No light in the windows of the balcony room. The stars brightened in the clear grey, and in the soft twilight all things were dimly defined—not dark, but shadowy.

The quarter chimed from the church tower behind the trees yonder, and still there was no movement in the garden. Gilbert stood motionless, his attention divided between the old Dutch garden with its geometrical flower-beds and stone sun-dial, and the windows of the balcony room. As the sound of the church clock dwindled slowly into silence, a light appeared in the centre window, a candle held in a

woman's hand, and raised above her head. Gilbert could but faintly distinguish the dark figure in the feeble glimmer of that single candle before figure and light vanished.

A signal, evidently, for a minute later a man appeared from the angle of the hedge, where he had been hidden in shadow. A man—tall, strongly built—yes, just the figure that patient watcher expected—stepped lightly across the garden, carefully keeping to the narrow gravel paths, leaving no tell-tale footprint on flower-bed or box-border. He reached the iron stair, mounted it swiftly, and had his foot on the balcony, when Gilbert Sinclair fired, with the unerring aim of a practised sportsman, and the firm hand of a man who has made up his mind for the worst.

The figure reeled, swayed for a moment on the topmost step, and then rolled backwards down the light iron stair, shaking it with the force of the fall, and sank in a heap on the gravel path below.

Gilbert waited, expecting to be thrilled by a woman's piercing shriek, the despairing cry of a guilty soul; but no such cry came. All was darkness

in the balcony room. He fancied he saw a figure approach the window and look out, but whatever that shape was it vanished before he could verify his doubts.

He went over to the chimney-piece and put away his gun, as coolly as if the purpose for which he had just used it were the most ordinary business of daily life; but this mechanical tranquillity had very little significance. It was rather the automatic precision of a sleep-walker than the calmness of a mind that realises the weight and measure of its acts. He went back to the window. There lay the figure, huddled in a formless heap, as it had fallen, hideously foreshortened from Gilbert's point of sight. The outspread hands clutched the loose gravel.

No sound, no light yet in the balcony room.

'She does not know what has happened,' said Gilbert, grimly. 'I had better go and tell her.'

He unlocked his door and went out in the corridor. His wife's bedroom opened out of the balcony room. The child slept in a smaller room adjoining that. He went into the balcony room, and

found it empty, then opened the bedroom door and paused on the threshold, looking in.

Impossible to imagine a more peaceful picture than that which met the husband's eyes! A night-lamp shed a faint light over the curtained bed, an open book and an extinguished candle on a little table by the bedside showed that Constance had read herself to sleep. The door of the inner room stood half open, and Gilbert could see the little white crib, and the sleeping child. The mother's face was hardly less placid in its repose than the child's.

Gilbert Sinclair felt as if this world and this life were one inextricable confusion. The anonymous letter had told him where and when to watch—and the writer of that letter had kept faith with him so far—since he had not watched in vain. But this spectacle of innocent repose, the mother sleeping near the child, was hardly in keeping. Gilbert paused irresolute—and then went to his wife's bedside and roused her roughly with his strong hand upon her arm.

The gentle eyes opened suddenly and looked at him full of bewilderment.

'Gilbert! Back to-night? I didn't expect you. Why do you look at me like that? What has happened?'

'Can't you guess? You didn't expect me. You had made your plans accordingly. You had made an appointment with your lover.'

'Gilbert, are you mad?'

'He has not disappointed you—he is here. Get up and come and see him. Quick. He is waiting.'

'Gilbert, what have you been doing—where have you been? Calm yourself, for heaven's sake.'

She had risen and put on her slippers and dressing-gown, scared by her husband's looks and words, not knowing whether to think him mad or drunk—recalling with a shudder that other scene in the summer house, and expecting some new violence. He would kill her perhaps. She trembled a little, believing herself in the power of a madman, but tried to be calm.

'Come,' he said, grasping her wrist, 'I am too much a gentleman to let your lover wait yonder—on the threshold of his own house, too. Strange, that

he should try to sneak in like a burglar, when he will be master here in a few days.'

He dragged her into the next room, and to the balcony.

'Pray, don't be so violent, Gilbert. I will come anywhere you please,' she said, quietly.

From the balcony she saw that prostrate figure at the foot of the stairs, and gave a faint cry of horror.

'Gilbert, what have you done?'

'My duty as a man. I should loathe myself if I had done less.'

She followed him down the steps, trembling in every limb, and clung to him as he knelt by the motionless figure, and turned the face upward to the faint light of a new risen moon.

A very familiar face, but not the one Gilbert Sinclair expected to see. The face of his ally, James Wyatt, grey with the dull grey of death, but not distorted. A mean, false face in life or death; but death brought out the dominant expression a little more forcibly than life had done.

'Gilbert, what have you done?' repeated Constance, sobbing hysterically.

'Murder,' answered her husband, with a stolid despair. 'I hated this fellow badly enough, but I didn't mean to kill him. I meant to kill Sir Cyprian Davenant, with whom you had made an appointment to-night, counting on my absence.'

'Gilbert, what have I ever done that you should think me the vilest of women? I have never wronged you by one thought about Cyprian Davenant, which you might not know; I have never spoken a word to him which you might not hear—you and all the world. Your jealousy of him has been madness from first to last, and now it has ended in murder.'

'I have been trapped somehow. Some enemy has set a snare for me.'

'What are you to do? Oh, Gilbert, is he dead?'

'Yes, my bullet finished him. I aimed under his shoulder, where I knew it would be fatal. What am I to do? Cut and run, I suppose?'

'Yes; go, go—it is your only chance. No one knows yet. Go, for God's sake, this moment.'

'And leave you with a corpse on the premises?—rather cowardly that.'

'Don't think of me—it is life or death for you.

You must go, Gilbert. There is no help. Go, or you will be taken, tried, and hanged,' cried Constance, clinging to the iron rail, trembling, icy cold, the ground reeling under her feet.

'Yes, that's the natural sequence. Fool, fool, fool! An anonymous slanderer. What can have brought him here, and to the windows of your room? Constance, what does it mean? Do you know why this man came?'

But Constance could not answer him. She had fallen, fainting, on the iron stair.

Gilbert carried her back to her room, and laid her on her bed. She would come to her senses soon enough, no doubt, poor wretch, he thought, hopelessly. He hurried back to his victim, intent upon finding some clue to Wyatt's presence in that place to-night. He ransacked the dead man's pockets, took out a bundle of letters, put them in his breast pocket, and left the garden by the little gate in the holly hedge. The church clock chimed the half-hour as he entered the park. It seemed to him as if that last quarter of an hour had been half a lifetime. Now for the first time he drew breath, and began to think what he

ought to do. Cut and run,—yes, as his wife said, that was about his only chance.

He stopped for a minute among the shadows of the tall old elms, gaunt rugged old trunks from which wintry blasts and summer storms had swept many a limb, stopped to 'pull himself together,' in his own phraseology, and settle what he should do.

There was an up train—the last—due at the little station yonder at five minutes before eleven. If he could catch that and sleep at his hotel—the place where he was known—and his rooms taken for to-night? He would have to run for it, but it might be done; and then he would be able to prove an alibi, provided no one saw him at the station.

He reached the rough little bye-road leading to the station, breathless, as the bell rang. He did not go into the ticket-office, where the porters might have recognized him, but scrambled up the embankment upon which the station-master grew his potatoes and strawberry plants, and was on the platform, at the end furthest from the station, as the train came in. It was full of market people, soldiers or militia, noisy excursionists. He opened a crowded third

class carriage with his key and got in among the rabble. A sergeant in an advanced state of beer was inclined to resent the intrusion, a woman with a baby seconded the sergeant. The atmosphere was cloudy with the reek of bad tobacco. Not much chance of recognition here.

He had his season-ticket, but did not care to show it. The fact might be remembered by some quick-witted collector. The train had only come from Maidstone. He thought it safer to pay his fare through, at the station where tickets were examined.

It was a little after midnight when Mr. Sinclair drove up to his hotel—a small house in St. James's, chiefly affected by men about town.

'Room ready, James? Yes, of course it is. You got my telegram yesterday. Been dining with some fellows—kept me deuced late. You can bring me a brandy and soda upstairs. That's all.'

'Sorry the 'orse lost, sir,' said the man, with respectful sympathy.

'What horse?' asked Gilbert, with a vacant look.

'Beg your pardon, sir—Goblin, sir—thought he was safe to win the Cup. Took the liberty to put

'arf a sufferin on him. You bein' a old customer, you see, sir, and all of us feelin' interested in the 'oss on that account.'

'That was a good fellow. The ground was too hard for him—goes better in the dirt?'

He went up to his bedroom after this brief colloquy, leaving the head waiter under the impression that Mr. Sinclair had been dining rather more freely than usual.

'Didn't seem to understand me when I spoke to him about his own 'oss,' said the waiter to his friends in council; 'stared at me reg'lar mazed.'

'Ah, pore feller, he's 'it pretty 'ard to-day, you may depend.'

Mr. Sinclair's last order to the waiter, who carried the brandy and soda to his bedroom, was to be called at half-past six next morning.

'You'll have a cab at the door at a quarter-past seven,' he said; 'I want to catch the seven-thirty train into Kent. I ought to have got home to-night if I could have done it.'

'Yes, sir; half-past six, sir. Anything particklar you would like for breakfast?'

'Oh, anything!'

'A bit of fish, sir, and a spatch-cock, or a devil?' suggested the waiter, pertinaciously. Nothing can subdue that solicitude to obtain an order which is the waiter's ruling passion.

'Fish—flesh—anything,' cried Gilbert, kicking off his boots.

'A salmon cutlet, sir, with Dutch soss?'

'An elephant, if you like. Get me the cab at a quarter-past seven. A hansom, with a good horse.'

'Yes, sir, an 'ansom and a fast 'oss. Yes, sir. Tea or coffee, sir?'

Mr. Sinclair banged his door in the waiter's face.

'The Baron Osy starts at eight to-morrow,' said Gilbert, referring to his Bradshaw, the only literature he carried about him constantly. 'I shall be in Antwerp on Saturday.'

Then, after a pause, he asked himself,—

'Might it not be wiser to hold my ground and trust to the chapter of accidents? Who is to bring that traitor's death home to me? I sleep here to-night. No one saw me at Davenant.'

Again, after another interval of thought,—

'How can I be sure that no one saw me yonder? These things are always brought home to a man somehow. A child—a dog—an idiot—the halt—dumb—blind—some unexpected witness rises up against him and puts the rope round his neck. My best chance is to put the seas between me and a coroner's jury. First, Antwerp, and then a steamer for South America—Carthagena, or some lawless place where a man might laugh at extradition treaties. Besides, I'm sick of it all at home—too sick to stand to my guns and outface suspicion, and live in this country with that dead man's face staring at me. No, I'll try some strange, wild land, a new life that will be fiery enough to burn out the memory of the old one.'

He went to the mantelpiece, where a pair of wax candles were burning, with that air of elegant luxury by which your skilled hotel keeper seeks to reconcile his customers to the extravagance of his charges, and took James Wyatt's letters out of his breast-pockets.

The first three or four he looked at were business letters, chiefly entreaties to 'renew' or carry over, or provide for some little bill just falling due, 'like

the best of good fellows.' These Gilbert laid aside, after a glance, but there was one at which he started as if he had touched a snake. It was in the same hand as the anonymous letter that had made him a murderer.

This, in plain words, was the gist of the letter—badly spelled, with a foreigner's uncouth orthography—curiously worded, with a mixture of foreign idioms and illiterate English.

'You tell me that all your promises amount to nothing, that you never meant to marry me. Rather hard to discover this after having nursed my delusion so long. I was to be a lady. I was to take my place in the world. Bah! all lies! Lies, like your pretended love—your pretended admiration. You ask me to go back to my country, and promise if I consent to this I shall be provided for—handsomely—with fifty pounds a year for life, whether I remain single or marry—an independence for a girl like me, you say. *Soit.* But who is to secure to me this independence? It may be paid me for a year—two years, perhaps—and then cease. It must that I see you, Mr. Wyatt. It must that I hear of your proper

mouth what you mean. Your soft tongue is too strong for me. You could persuade me to do anything—to go anywhere—to serve and obey you as your slave; but I cannot obey to your letters. I do not understand. I want to see things clearly—to have your views explained to me.

'You say that I am passionate—vindictive—and that when last we met—and, ah! how kind it was of you to come here at my request—my violence almost frightened you. Believe me, I will not so offend again. Come but once more—only come and assure me with your own lips that this miserable pittance shall be paid to me honourably year by year—give me but your word for that and I will go back to my friends in the South of France—ah—*comme ce sera loin de toi, mon ami*—and you shall hear of me never again.

'You tell me that you are no longer friends with Mr. Sinclair, and that you cannot come to his house, and that if I want to see you it must that I come to you. That cannot without throwing up my place altogether, for the housekeeper here is of the most tyrannical, and gives no servant leave to absent her-

self, and I will not give up this service until I am assured of my future. Give me then a proof of your good faith by coming here. Give me my pittance a year in advance, and show me how it is to be afterwards paid me, and I will trouble you no more.

'It will be very easy for you to come on the evening of the 17th. Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair are going to Ascot on the 15th; they will be absent some days. You know your way to the balcony room. I shall be waiting for you there between ten and eleven on Thursday evening, and I will show a light in the centre window as a signal that the coast is clear.

'Come if you wish me to trust you. Come if you do not wish me to betray you.

'Yours, as you treat me,

'MELANIE DUPORT.'

This letter showed Gilbert Sinclair the trap that had been set for James Wyatt and for himself. He had been made the instrument of the Frenchwoman's revenge.

In the face of this revelation what was he to do? Carry out his intention; go to South America, and

leave his wife in the power of this fiend? Gilbert Sinclair was not bad enough for that.

'I'll risk it, and go back to Davenant,' he said. 'How do I know what this wretch might do? She might lay her lover's death at my wife's door. Drag my wife's name in the gutter. No, at any hazard to myself I must be there, and, if necessary, this letter must be shown at the inquest.'

## CHAPTER V.

### CROWNER'S QUEST.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the morning, when one of the gardeners at Davenant, going with a barrowful of bedding-out plants to the old Dutch garden, found James Wyatt lying dead at the bottom of the iron staircase. He rushed into the house for aid, and brought out the newly-risen men-servants, who had not yet fortified exhausted nature with an Elizabethan breakfast of beef and beer. All was hubbub and confusion; one messenger ran for the doctor, another for the police. The dead man was carried into a great disused brewhouse at the back of the stables, as a place where he would not hurt any one's feelings, as the butler remarked, considerately.

'What a horful thing!' said one housemaid, and 'Who could have done it?' ejaculated another, as the news of the catastrophe spread through the house.

Who was to tell Mrs. Sinclair?

Martha Briggs took that office upon herself. She had just filled Miss Christabel's bath, but the darling was not awake yet, and Mrs. Sinclair was most likely still asleep.

'I'll tell her when I take her her cup of tea at half-past seven,' said Martha, looking pale and scared.

'Where's Melanie?' asked the upper housemaid.

'She asked leave to go to London early this morning, to get herself some things. As if Maidstone wasn't good enough for her! She wanted to go by the first train to have a long day of it, she said. The first train goes at six. She must have left this house at half-past five.'

'That's queer,' said the housemaid. 'But I never had much opinion of foreigners.'

'What could have brought Mr. Wyatt here last night, and to the bottom of those steps?' speculated Martha Briggs. 'Why didn't he go to the hall door, as usual? It seems so strange!'

'It seems stranger that there should be any one there to shoot him,' remarked the housemaid.

Mrs. Sinclair heard of the morning's discovery with a calmness which astonished her handmaiden.

'I must telegraph to my husband,' she said; and a telegram was despatched without delay, addressed to Gilbert at his hotel in St. James's.

The police were on the alert by this time, examining the scene of the murder. The coroner appointed three o'clock in the afternoon for his inquiry, which was to be held in the hall at Davenant. This would give time for summoning the jury.

Constance was sitting at breakfast, very pale but quite self-possessed, when Gilbert Sinclair walked in from the lawn.

'Gilbert,' she cried, 'what folly! I thought you were across the Channel by this time.'

'No, Constance, I am not such a poltroon. We have not been a very happy couple, you and I; and God knows I am heartily tired of my life in this country; but I am not base enough to leave you in the lurch. Who can tell what scandal might arise against you? No, my dear, I shall stop, even if the end is to be a rope.'

'Gilbert, for mercy's sake! Oh, Gilbert!' she

cried, wringing her hands, 'how could you do this dreadful thing?'

'How could I? I thought I was doing my duty as a man. I was told that a man was to be here—your secret visitor. The man was here, at the very hour I had been told to expect him. I saw him entering your room by stealth. What could I think but the worst? And thinking as I did I had a right to kill him.'

'No, Gilbert, no; God has given no man the right to shed his brother's blood.'

'Except Jack Ketch, I suppose? God has given men the instinct of honour and honour teaches every honest man to kill the educer of his wife or daughter.'

* * * *

The inquest was held at three. Gilbert and several of his household, notably the gardener who found the body, were examined. Dr. Webb gave his evidence as to the nature of the wound, and the hour at which death must, in all probability, have occurred.

'Did you sleep at Davenant last night, Mr. Sinclair?' asked the coroner.

'No. I only came up from Ascot yesterday evening, and spent the night in London.'

'Where?'

'At Hildred's Hotel, Jermyn-street.'

'Did you dine at the hotel?'

'No, I dined at Francatelli's.'

This was a venture. Francatelli's would doubtless have been crowded on the night after Ascot, and it would be difficult for the waiters to assert that Mr. Sinclair had not dined there.

'You dined at Francatelli's. Where is that?' asked one of the jury, with rural innocence.

'It is an hotel and restaurant, in Piccadilly.'

'How long were you at Francatelli's?' asked the coroner.

'I really cannot tell. My horse had been running at Ascot, and losing. I was somewhat excited. I may have gone into Francatelli's at eight, and gone out again between nine and ten.'

'And from Francatelli's you went to your hotel?'

'No,' said Gilbert, feeling that there was a hiatus of a couple of hours here. 'I went into the Haymarket Theatre for an hour or two.'

'If this fellow asks me what I saw there I'm done for,' he thought; but happily the coroner was not so much on the alert as to put that question.

'Have you any idea what brought the deceased to your house last night, when you were known to be absent?'

'I have a very clear idea.'

'Be kind enough to tell us all you can.'

'Coming from the station this morning by a footpath through the park, the way by which the deceased always came to my house when he did not drive from the station, I found a letter, which it seems to me that he must have dropped there last night.'

'You found a letter dropped by the deceased in Davenant Park?'

'I found this letter addressed to Mr. Wyatt, which I conclude must have been dropped by him last night.'

Gilbert handed the coroner Melanie's letter, which had now assumed a crumpled and dilapidated appearance, as of a letter that had lain all night in the dew and dirt of the footpath under the trees.

The coroner puzzled through the letter, reading

it aloud, with various mistakes and pullings up and tryings back, the jury listening open mouthed.

'This clearly indicates that Mr. Wyatt came here by appointment, remarked the coroner sagely. 'Who is this Melanie Duport ?'

'My wife's maid.'

'Why has she not been called ?'

It was explained to the coroner that Melanie Duport was missing.

After this, the jury having duly viewed the body, or, at any rate, made believe to view it, the inquest was adjourned, to give the local police time to make their investigations, though what they were to investigate seemed a somewhat puzzling question.

'They'll bring some London detectives, who will look into my room, see those guns, and then put two and two together,' thought Gilbert. 'I don't suppose my *alibi* would hold water at the assizes. A jury would want some independent evidence to sustain my account of my time between seven o'clock and midnight yesterday.'

* * * * *

The inquest was adjourned from Friday—the

day after the murder—until the following Monday When that day came Gilbert Sinclair was missing. London detectives had come to the aid of the local constabulary, but too late to keep an eye upon the movements of Mr. Sinclair. That gentleman contrived to leave Liverpool on Saturday morning, in a steamer bound for Rio. His disappearance gave a new aspect to the case, and aroused suspicions of his guilt. His household knew nothing of his whereabouts. He had told Mrs. Sinclair and his body-servant that he was going to Newmarket, and would be back in time for the inquiry on Monday: but on an inquiry being telegraphed to his Newmarket establishment the reply was to the effect that Mr. Sinclair had not been seen there.

The police had occupied the interval between Friday and Monday in the endeavour to find Mademoiselle Duport, but up to noon on Monday that young lady had not been heard of, nor was any new fact disclosed at the inquest.

Enlightened by Gilbert Sinclair's disappearance, the police took a bolder flight. They discovered that the oriel window in Mr. Sinclair's study afforded

an excellent point of aim for the iron staircase, at the foot of which the murdered man had been found. They also opined that the handsome collection of guns in that apartment suggested a ready way of accounting for the mode and manner of the act. Subsequent investigation showed that the deer stalker's rifle in that collection carried a bullet exactly corresponding in size and shape to the bullet extracted from James Wyatt's death-wound. Professional acumen led the investigators further to perceive that Mr. Sinclair's own account of his time on the evening of the murder was not supported by any other evidence, and that it was possible for him to have come back to Davenant and to have entered and left his house unseen by any of the household.

These suspicions were in some measure confirmed by the statement of the waiter at Hildred's Hotel, who described Mr. Sinclair's arrival at that house after midnight, and a certain strangeness in his look and manner which had struck him at the time, and which he had spoken about to his fellow-servants afterwards.

Suspicion thus aroused, the next step was to pursue the suspected man; but Gilbert Sinclair had been lucky enough to get away from England without leaving any trail behind him. It had been a particularly busy time on the Liverpool quay that June morning, half a dozen big steamers starting for different parts of the globe—commerce at her best on the Mersey, and the trade with South America thriving. The business-like looking man with a single portmanteau, had taken his berth, and slipped on board the *Chimborazo* without attracting special notice from any one; and for once in a way Scotland Yard was at fault.

The coroner's inquest dragged its slow length along. No new evidence was elicited to make the case stronger against Gilbert Sinclair. The fact of his departure remained the one damning fact against him.

There was also the fact of Melanie Duport's disappearance on the morning of the murder, and opinions were divided as to which of these two was guilty, or whether both had not been concerned in the act.

The newspapers made much capital out of an event which soon became known as the Davenant Mystery, and Constance Sinclair had the horror of knowing that she was the object of a morbid interest in the minds of the nation at large. She left Davenant almost immediately after her husband, and took up her abode at Marchbrook, with Martha Briggs and the little girl for her only companions, until the arrival of Lord Clanyarde from the Continent.

The inquiry before the coroner ended at last in an open verdict. The deceased had been shot by some person or persons unknown.

Davenant was formally taken possession of upon Midsummer Day, not by Sir Cyprian Davenant, but by his lawyer, who installed some of the old family servants as care-takers. Sir Cyprian had left England a few days before James Wyatt's death for the north of Europe, his long talked of African expedition being postponed till the autumn.

The year wore round, and the horror of James Wyatt's unexplained death faded out of the national mind, as all such horrors do fade when the newspapers leave off writing about them. Constance lived

her quiet life at Marchbrook, as she had lived at Davenant, happy with her child, yet mindful, with a shuddering pity, of that friendless wanderer doomed to bear the brand of Cain. Christmas came and passed, and for nearly a year she had remained in ignorance of her husband's fate. Then came a letter in a strange hand, but signed by Gilbert Sinclair.—

'Dear Constance,

'I am down with a malignant fever common to this part of the world, and generally fatal. Before I die I should like to ask you to forgive me for all the pain my jealousy gave you in days gone by, and to tell you that I now believe that jealousy to have been causeless. It was what the thieves call a "put up" business, and Wyatt was the Iago. He set a trap for me, and got snared himself in the end.

'I want to tell you something else which may perhaps distress you, but which is no fault of mine. The child you are so fond of is not your own. Poor little Christabel was really drowned, and the little girl brought to Davenant while you were ill is a child adopted for the purpose of bringing about your

recovery. This plan was suggested to me by your father. He knows all about it.

'I have made my will, and sent it to my London lawyers. I leave you everything. So, if matters continue prosperous in the north, you will be a very rich woman. I wasted a good deal of money on the Newmarket stable; but, with your quiet life, you will soon recover lost ground. Of course you will marry C. D. Well, I can't help that. I ought never to have thrust myself between you and your first love. Nothing but misery has come of our marriage.

'God bless you, and give you a happier life than you would ever have spent with me.

'Your dying husband,

'GILBERT SINCLAIR.

'P.S.—If I go, the man who writes this, Thomas Grace, tobacco grower, will send you the certificate of my death, and all necessary evidence. If I live, you shall hear from me again.'

## CHAPTER VI.

### CRUEL KINDNESS.

That letter from her dying husband was a crushing blow to Constance Sinclair. There was the keen sense of loss, the knowledge that her lovely child had verily sunk beneath the German river, never to rise again, save as a spirit amidst the choir of angels. There was the deep humiliation of knowing that she had been duped. They had taken advantage of her affliction, and consoled her with a lie. She had been fooled, deceived, and deluded, as a child is deluded, for her good. Her soul rose up against this mockery of consolation in bitterest anger. Her very thanksgivings to Heaven—those outpourings of a mother's grateful heart overflowing with its wealth of joy—had been offered up in vain. She had no reason to be thankful. Heaven and earth had conspired in ill-treating her. God had taken away her reason, and man had imposed upon her folly. Whom upon earth

could she ever trust again, when even her father had so deceived her ?

With her husband's letter came the certificate of his death. The same post brought her a letter from Gilbert's lawyers to inform her of their receipt of his will, executed on his death-bed.

She was sorry for the wasted life, the lonely death in a strange land, and Gilbert Sinclair was mourned with more honest tears than are always shed for a husband's loss, even when the journey of wedded life has begun in the rosy light of a romantic love.

After those tears given to the untimely dead the widow's thoughts were full of anger. She could not forgive the deception that had been practised, even though it had been done to save her life.

'Better a thousand times to have died in that dim dream than to awake to such a disappointment as this,' she said.

And then she thought of the river in the fair German valley, and that agonizing day which she had learned to look back upon as no more than a painful and prolonged dream. She knew now that it had been no dream, but a hideous reality.

While she sat with Gilbert's letter open before her, abandoned to a tearless despair, the little one's voice sounded in the corridor, and she heard the light, swift footstep which always made her heart thrill. To-day the familiar sound struck her with an actual pain. She rose involuntarily and ran to the door, as she had been accustomed to run to meet her pet, rejoicing at the child's approach; but with her hand upon the door she stopped suddenly.

'No, I won't see her—little impostor!—living lie!—to have stolen my love! and my dead child looking down upon me from heaven all the while—looking down to see her place filled by a stranger—lonely in heaven, perhaps, for want of a mother's love, and seeing her mother's heart given to another!'

The light tripping steps came nearer.

'Mamma! mamma!' called the glad young voice.

Constance locked the door.

'Go away,' she cried, hoarsely; 'I don't want you!'

There was a pause—complete silence—and then

a burst of sobbing. The strangeness of that tone had chilled the child's heart. Lips that had hitherto breathed only love, to-day spoke with the accents of loathing. Instinct told the child the greatness of the change.

The little feet retreated slowly down the corridor —not so light of step this time—the sobs died away in the distance.

'I will never see her face again!' cried Constance. 'Some wretched child!—perhaps the offspring of sin—base at heart as she is fair of face—and so like my lost one—so like—so like! No, I will send her away—settle a sum of money—provide handsomely for her. Poor child! it is not her crime. But I will never see her again! Yet, O God, I love her! And she is crying now, perhaps. The loving little heart will break.'

She had been pacing the room distractedly. This last thought was too much to bear. She ran to the door, unlocked it, and went out into the corridor, calling, 'Belle, darling, come back!'

She went to the little one's nursery, and found her lying with her face buried in the sofa pillow,

sobbing piteously. To-day's harsh tones were her first experience of unkindness. Constance threw herself on the sofa, and caught the child in her arms, drew the little trembling form to her breast, and kissed and cried over it.

'My pet, I love you. I shall love you to my dying day,' she cried, passionately. 'Hearts cannot be played with like this. Love cannot be given and taken away.'

The child hugged her, and was comforted, understanding the love though not the words that told it.

'Belle hasn't been naughty, has she, mamma?' she asked, with innocent wonder.

'No, pet, but mamma has been very unhappy. Mamma has had a sad letter. Oh, here comes Martha,' as that devoted nurse entered from the night nursery. 'Do you know, Martha, I think Christabel wants change of air. You must take her to Hastings for a little while.'

'Lor, mum, that would be nice. But you'll come, too, of course? You wouldn't like to be parted from her.'

'I don't know that I could come quite at first. I

might come afterwards, perhaps. I have some very sad business to attend to.'

Constance told Martha of Mr. Sinclair's death, but not a word of that imposture which had just been revealed to her. Martha had been as completely deceived as she had, no doubt, Constance argued, for she knew it was not in the girl's honest nature to assist in a deception. The changeling's likeness to the lost child had deluded them both.

'I suppose all children of the same age and complexion are alike?' thought Constance. 'And yet I fancied my baby was different from all other children.'

She wished to send the child away, in order, if it were possible, to cure herself of the habit of loving a child that had no claim on her—to love whom was a kind of treason against the beloved dead.

The preparations for the journey were hurried over. Martha was delighted to pack and be off. The child was pleased to go, but cried at parting from 'mamma.' At two o'clock in the afternoon the carriage drove Martha and her charge to the station, with the steady old Marchbrook butler for their escort. He was to take lodgings for them, and make all things easy for

them, and see them comfortably settled before he came back to Marchbrook.

Constance breathed more freely when the child was out of the house, and there was no chance of hearing that light footstep, that clear, sweet, childish voice. Yet how dreary the big old house seemed in its solitude, how gloomy the rooms, without that fluttering changeful soul and all the busy life she made around her. The family of dolls, the menagerie of woolly animals, all afflicted with the same unnatural squeak, an internal noise never heard to issue from any animal that ever existed in the zoological kingdom.

'It would have broken my heart to keep her near me,' thought Constance, 'and I feel as if it must break my heart to lose her.'

By way of solace, or to sustain her in the indignant pride which revolted against this spurious child, she tried to think of Christabel in heaven. But her thoughts wandered back to the living child, and she found herself wondering whether Martha and her charge were at the end of their journey, and longing for the telegram to announce their safe arrival.

'What folly!' she thought, angrily. 'A stranger's child, a creature that is no more to me than any of the children at the infant school, and yet I cannot tear her from my heart.'

She sent for Dr. Webb. He was in the plot, doubtless. It was at his advice, perhaps, that this heartless deception had been practised upon her. If it were so, she felt that she must hate him all her life.

The little village surgeon came briskly enough, expecting to find a mild case of measles, or some other infantile ailment, in the Marchbrook nursery. What was his astonishment when he found Constance pacing the long dreary drawing-room, pale, with two burning spots on her cheeks, her eyes bright with fever.

'My dear Mrs. Sinclair, what is the matter?'

'Everything,' cried Constance. 'My poor husband is dead, and on his death-bed wrote me a letter telling me the cruel truth. Your wicked plot has been discovered. Yes, wicked, for all lies are wicked. You cannot do evil that good may come of it. You saved my life, perhaps, but what a life! To find that

I have lavished my love upon an impostor; that when I thanked God, on my knees, for His bounteous mercies, I had received no gracious gift! He had shown no pity for my sorrows; but you—you and my father—had played at Providence, and had pretended to perform a miracle for my sake. It was an infamous deception.'

'It was designed to save your life, and, what is even more precious than life, your reason,' replied Dr. Webb, wounded by the harshness of this attack. 'But whatever blame may attach to the stratagem you may spare me your censure. I had nothing to do with it. The German physician, whom your father brought here, was the adviser from whom the suggestion came. He and your father carried it out between them. I had nothing to do but look on, and watch the effect of the shock upon you. *That* was most happy.'

'The German doctor!' said Constance, wonderingly. 'Yes, I remember him faintly, as if it were a dream—that winter night. He made me sing, did he not? His voice had a mesmerical effect upon me. I obeyed him involuntarily. His pre-

sence seemed to give me comfort, stranger though he was. It was very curious. And then he bent over me and whispered hope, and from that instant I felt happier. And it was all a mockery after all; it was a trick! Tell me who and what that child is, Dr. Webb.'

'I know nothing of her origin. Lord Clanyarde brought her to Davenant. That is all I can tell you.'

'Fool! fool! fool!' cried Constance, with passionate self-reproach, 'to take an impostor to my heart so blindly, to ask no questions, to believe without proof or witness that Heaven had performed a miracle for my happiness! What right had I to suppose that Providence would care so much for me?'

'You have great cause to be thankful for the restoration of life and reason, Mrs. Sinclair,' said the doctor, reproachfully.

'Not if life is barren and hopeless; not if reason tells me that I am childless.'

'You have learnt to love this strange child. Cannot you take consolation from that affection?'

'No. I loved her because I believed she was my own. It would be treason against my dead child to love this impostor.'

'And you will turn her out of doors, I suppose —send her to the workhouse?'

'I am not so heartless as that. Her future shall be provided for. But I shall never see her again. I have sent her to Hastings with her nurse, who adores her.'

'That's fortunate, since she is to be deprived of everybody else's affection.'

There was some acidity in the doctor's tone. He had attended the child in various small illnesses, had met her almost daily, riding her Shetland pony in the lanes, and entertained a warm regard for the pretty little winning creature, who used to purse up her lips into a rosebud for him to kiss, and had evidently not the least idea that he was old and ugly.

'Since you can tell me nothing, I shall send for my father,' said Constance. 'He must know to whom the child belongs.'

'I should imagine so,' replied the doctor, glad to feel himself absolved of all blame.

It was a painful position, certainly, he thought. He had anticipated this difficulty from the beginning of things. He was very glad to take his leave of his patient, after hazarding a platitude or two by way of consolation.

Lord Clanyarde was in Paris, enjoying the gaieties of the cheerful season before Lent, and making himself extremely comfortable in his bachelor room at the Hotel Bristol. He had married all his daughters advantageously, and buried his wife, and felt that his mission had been accomplished, and that he was free to make his pathway to the grave as pleasant as he could. From January to March he found his aged steps travelled easiest over the asphalte of Paris, and as poor Constance was happy with her adopted child he felt no scruples about leaving her to enjoy life in her own way.

Mrs. Sinclair's telegram, informing him of her husband's death, and entreating him to go to Marchbrook, disturbed the placidity of his temper.

'Poor Sinclair!' he muttered, with more fretfulness than regret. 'Pity he couldn't have died at a more convenient time. I hate crossing the Channel

in an equinoctial gale. And what good can I do at Marchbrook? However, I suppose I must go. Women are so helpless. She never cared much for him, poor child; and there's Davenant still unmarried and devoted to her. An excellent match, too, since he came into old Gryffin's money. Providence orders all things for the best. I hope I shall have a fine night for crossing.'

He was with Constance early on the following day, having lost no time in obeying her summons; but he was unprepared for the accusation she brought against him.

'Upon my life, Constance, I was only a passive instrument in the whole affair, just like little Webb. It was put to me that this thing must be done to save your life, and I consented.'

'You let a stranger take my destiny into his hands,' cried Constance, indignantly.

'He was not a stranger. He loved you dearly—was as anxious for your welfare as even I, your father.'

'The German physician, the white-haired old man who told me to hope? Why, he had never seen me before in his life!'

'The man who told you to hope, who persuaded me to agree to the introduction of a spurious child, was no German doctor. He was neither old nor white-haired, and he had loved you devotedly for years. He heard you were dying of a broken heart, and came to you in disguise in order to see if love could devise some means of saving you. The German doctor was Cyprian Davenant.'

This was another blow for Constance. The man whom she had reverenced as the soul of honour was the originator of the scheme she had denounced as wicked and cruel; and yet she could find no words of blame for him. She remembered the gentle voice which had penetrated her ear and mind through the thick mists of madness, remembered the tones that had touched her with a wondering sense of something familiar and dear. He had come to her in her apathy and despair, and from the moment of his coming her life had brightened and grown happy. It was but a delusive happiness, a false peace; and now she must go back to the old agony of desolation and incurable regret.

'You can at least tell me who and what that child is, papa,' she said after a long pause.

'Indeed, my love, I know nothing, except that Davenant told me she belonged to decently born people, and would never be claimed by any one. And the poor little thing looked so thoroughly clean and respectable. Of course at that age one can hardly tell—the features are so undeveloped—the nose more like a morsel of putty than anything human—but I really did think that the child had a thorough-bred look; and I am sure when I saw her last Christmas she looked as complete a lady as ever came out of our Marchbrook nursery.'

'She is a lovely child,' said Constance, 'and I have loved her passionately.'

'Then, my dearest girl, why not go on loving her?' pleaded Lord Clanyarde. 'Call her your adopted child, if you like, and keep her about you as your pet and companion till you are married again, and have children of your own. You can then relegate her to her natural position, and by and by get her respectably married, or portion her off in some way.'

'No,' said Constance, resolutely, 'I will never see her again.'

And all the while she was longing to take the afternoon train to Hastings and rejoin her darling.

After this there was no more for Constance Sinclair to do but to submit to fate, and consider herself once more a childless mother. Sir Cyprian was away, no one knew where, and even had he been in England Constance felt that there would be little use in knowing more than she knew already. The knowledge of the strange child's parentage could be but of the smallest importance to her, since she meant to banish the little one from her heart and home.

Lord Clanyarde and the lawyers did all that was necessary to secure Mrs. Sinclair's position as inheritor of her husband's estates. The Newmarket stables and stud were sold, and realized a considerable sum, as the training stable was supposed to be the most perfect establishment of its kind—built on hygienic principles, with all modern improvements—and was warmly competed for by numerous foolish young noblemen and gentlemen who were just setting

out on that broad road along which Gilbert Sinclair had travelled at so swift a rate. Things in the north had been steadily improving—the men were growing wiser, and arbitration between master and men was taking the place of trade-union tyranny.

Constance Sinclair found herself in a fair way to become a very rich woman; but she cared about as much for the money her husband had left her as for the withered leaves that fell from the Marchbrook elms in the dull, hopeless autumn days. What was the use of wealth to a childless widow, who could have been content to live in a lodging of three rooms, with one faithful servant?

## CHAPTER VII.

### AFTER MANY DAYS.

A COMMON specific for a broken heart, when the patient happens to be a person of handsome fortune —for your pauper hard work is your only cure—is foreign travel. Lord Clanyarde, who hated Marchbrook, now suggested this remedy to his daughter. He felt that it was his duty to afford her the benefit of his protection and society during the first period of her widowhood; and it struck him that it would be more agreeable for both of them to lead a nomadic life than to sit opposite each other by the family hearth and brood upon the sorrows of this mortal life, or read the family Bible.

'It would be quite the right season for Rome, love, if we were to start at once,' said Lord Clanyarde, soothingly.

He knew several pretty women in Rome—mostly Americans,—and it was just possible the hunting in

the Campagna might not be over. And there were those Bohemian artists—French and German—with their long hair and velvet coats, and free and easy painting-rooms, and wild amusing talk. Lord Clanyarde had just sufficient love of art to enjoy that kind of society. Altogether he felt that Rome was the place for Constance. She would see St. Peter's at Easter, and the Colosseum by moonlight, and so on, and the aching void in her heart would be filled.

Constance yielded to her father's suggestion with a graceful submission that charmed him. She cared very little whither she went. The little girl was still at Hastings with honest Martha; she cried sometimes for mamma, but was happy, upon the whole, Martha wrote, wondering very much why she and her charge remained so long away. Martha knew nothing of the change that had taken place in her darling's position.

'Very well, dear,' said Lord Clanyarde. 'You have only to get your boxes packed; and, by the way, you had better write to your banker for circular notes. Five hundred will do to start with.'

Father and daughter went to Italy, and Constance

tried to find comfort in those classic scenes which are peopled with august shadows; but her heart was tortured by separation from the child, and it was only a resolute pride which withheld her from owning the truth—that the little one she had believed her own was as dear to her as the baby she had lost.

Easter came with all its religious splendours, its pomps and processions, and the Eternal City was crowded with strangers. Lord Clanyarde insisted that his daughter should see everything worth seeing, so the pale fair face in widow's weeds was an object of interest and admiration for many among the spectators at the great ceremonials of the church.

Lord Clanyarde and his daughter were driving on the Corso one sunny afternoon in the Easter week, when the gentleman's attention was attracted by a lady who drove a phaeton and a pair of cobs caparisoned in a fantastical fashion, with silver bells on their harness. The lady was past her first youth, but was still remarkably handsome, and was dressed with an artistic sense of colour and a daring disregard of the fashion of the day; dressed, in a word, to

look like an old picture, and not like a modern fashion-plate.

'Who can she be?' exclaimed Lord Clanyarde. 'Her face seems familar to me, yet I haven't the faintest idea where I've seen her.'

A few yards further on he encountered an acquaintance of the London clubs, and pulled up his horses on purpose to interrogate him about the unknown in the Spanish hat.

'Don't you know her?' asked Captain Flitter, with a surprised air. 'Yes, she's handsome, but *passée; sur le retour.*'

'Who is she?' repeated Lord Clanyarde.

Captain Flitter looked curiously at Mrs. Sinclair before he answered.

'Her name is Walsingham—widow of a Colonel Walsingham, colonel in the Spanish contingent—rather a bad egg; of course, I mean the gentleman.'

A light dawned on Lord Clanyarde's memory. Yes, this was the Mrs. Walsingham whom people had talked about years ago, before Sinclair's marriage, and it was Sinclair's money she was spending now, in all probability, on that fantastical turn-out

with its jingling bells. Lord Clanyarde felt himself personally aggrieved by the lady, and yet he thought he would like to see more of her.

'Does she stay long in Rome?' he asked the club lounger.

'She never stays long anywhere, I believe; very erratic, likes artists and musical people, and that sort of thing. She has a reception every Saturday evening. I always go. One meets people one doesn't see elsewhere—not the regulation tread-mill, you know."

Lord Clanyarde asked no more. He would be sure to meet Flitter at one of the artist's rooms, and could ask him as many questions about Mrs. Walsingham as he liked.

The two men met that very evening, and the result of their conversation was Lord Clanyarde's presentation to Mrs. Walsingham at her Saturday reception.

She was very gracious to him, and made room for him on the ottoman where she was seated, the centre of a circle of enthusiastic Americans, who thought her the nicest Englishwoman they had ever met.

Under the gentle light of the wax candles Lord

Clanyarde saw the face that had so charmed him in the Spanish hat. Seeing Mrs. Walsingham closer, he discovered that her beauty was a tradition rather than a fact; but she could at lea st command respect in that she had not invoked the aid of art to disguise the ravages of time and care. There was something noble in the faded beauty of her face. The finely-cut features were as lovely as in the freshness of youth, but the wan cheeks and sunken eyes, the dull and joyless look when the face was in repose, told of a desolate home and a dreary life.

'Who was that lady in deep mourning you were driving with yesterday?' Mrs. Walsingham asked presently.

'My youngest daughter, Mrs. Sinclair. You knew her husband, I think, some years ago. He is lately dead.'

'Yes, I saw his death in the *Times*, in that dismal column where we shall all appear in due course, I suppose.'

Lord Clanyarde looked at the speaker thoughtfully. It occurred to him that it might not be long before she too passed into that shadowy procession

which is always travelling through the columns of our favourite newspaper, the subject of a few careless exclamations. 'Dear me! who would have thought it?- It was only the other day we saw her. I wonder who gets her money?'

'Yes, he died in South America. You heard the story, I suppose? A most unfortunate business. His confidential solicitor was shot in Sinclair's own garden, by a French girl he had been foolish enough to get entangled with. The jealous little viper contrived to give the police the slip, and Sinclair saw himself in danger of being brought unpleasantly into the business, so he wisely left the country.'

'You believe that it was Melanie Duport who shot Mr. Wyatt?' Mrs. Walsingham exclaimed, eagerly.

'What! you remember the girl's name? Yes, there can hardly be a doubt as to her guilt. Who else had any motive for killing him? The creature's letter, luring him to the spot, was found in the park, and she disappeared on the morning of the murder. Those two facts are convincing, I should think,' concluded Lord Clanyarde, somewhat warmly.

He wanted to assoilzie his own race from the contamination of having intermarried with a murderer. For the manes of Sinclair, innocent or guilty, he cared very little; but a man whose grandchildren were growing big enough for Eton and Harrow had reason to be careful of the family repute.

'Yes, she was a wicked creature,' said Mrs. Walsingham, thoughtfully, 'she had a natural bent towards evil.'

'You speak as if you had known her.'

Mrs. Walsingham looked confused.

'I read the account of that dreadful business in the newspapers,' she said. 'I hope Mrs. Sinclair has quite recovered from the shock such an awful event must have caused her.'

'Well, yes, I think she has recovered from that. Her husband's death following so quickly was of course a blow, and since then she has had another trouble to bear.'

'Indeed! I am sorry,' said Mrs. Walsingham, with a thoughtful look.

'Yes. We did all for the best. She was dangerously ill, you know, about a year and a half ago, and

we—well, it was foolish, perhaps, though the plan succeeded for the moment,—we made her believe that her little girl had been saved from drowning, at Schönesthal, in the Black Forest. You may have heard of the circumstance.'

'Yes, yes.'

'It was quite wonderful. She received the strange child we introduced to her with delight—never doubted its identity with her own baby—and all went on well till poor Sinclair's death; but on his death-bed he wrote her a letter telling her——'

'That the child was not her own!' exclaimed Mrs. Walsingham. 'That must have hit her hard.'

'It did, poor girl. She has not yet recovered the blow, and I fear never will. What I most dread is her sinking back into the state in which she was the winter before last.'

'Where is Sir Cyprian Davenant?' asked Mrs. Walsingham, somewhat irrelevantly.

'At the other end of the world, I suppose. I believe he started for Africa some time last autumn.'

'Was there not some kind of early attachment

between him and Mrs. Sinclair? Pardon me for asking such a question.'

'Yes, I believe Davenant would have proposed for Constance if his circumstances had permitted him to hope for my consent?'

'Poor fellow! And he carried his broken heart to Africa; and came back to find fortune waiting for him, and your daughter married. Do you not think if he were to return now Mrs. Sinclair might be consoled for the loss of her child by reunion with the lover of her girlhood?'

'I doubt if anything would reconcile her to the loss of the little girl. Her affection for that child was an infatuation.

A pair of picturesque Italians began a duet by Verdi, and the conversation between Mrs. Walsingham and Lord Clanyarde went no further. He did not make any offer of bringing Constance to the lady's receptions; for the memory for that old alliance between Gilbert Sinclair and Mrs. Walsingham hung like a cloud over her reputation. No one had any specific charge to bring against her; but it was remembered that Sinclair had been her devoted

slave for a long time, and had ended his slavery by marrying somebody else.

'She's a charming woman, you know,' said Lord Clanyarde to the friend who had presented him to Mrs. Walsingham, 'but I feel a kind of awkwardness about asking her to call upon my daughter. You see I don't exactly understand her relations with poor Sinclair.'

Fortunately Mrs. Walsingham made no suggestion about calling on Mrs. Sinclair. She welcomed Lord Clanyarde graciously whenever he chose to go to her Saturday evenings. He heard the best music, met the nicest people, eat Neapolitan ices in cool, dimly-lighted rooms, and admired the fading beauties of the hostess. She reminded him of an autumn afternoon. The same rich glow of colour, the same prophecy of coming decay.

As the weeks went round Constance showed no improvement in health or spirits. Pride was making a sorry struggle in that broken heart. She would not go back to England and the spurious Christabel, though her heart yearned towards that guiltless impostor. She would not suffer another woman's

child to hold the place of her lost darling, no, not even though that strange child had made itself dearer to her than life.

Mrs. Sinclair's doctor informed Lord Clanyarde that Rome was getting too warm for his patient, whereupon that anxious parent was fain to tear himself away from the pleasures of the seven-hilled city and those delightful evenings at Mrs. Walsingham's.

'Our medical man threatens me with typhoid fever and all manner of horrors if I keep my daughter here any longer,' he said; 'so we start for the Upper Engadine almost immediately. You will not stay much longer in Rome, I suppose.'

'I don't know,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, carelessly; 'the place suits me better than any other. I am tired to death of London and Paris. There is some pleasure in life here: and I should like to be buried in the cemetery where Keats lies.'

'Yes, it's a nice place to be buried in, if one must be buried at all; but that's rather a gloomy consideration. I should strongly advise you to spend the summer in a healthier climate, and leave the burial question to chance.'

'Oh, I dare say I shall soon get tired of Rome. I always get tired of places before I have been very long in them; and if the artists go away I shall go too.'

Lord Clanyarde and his daughter left at the end of the week. There were fever cases talked of already, and all the American tourists had fled. Lord Clanyarde felt he was not getting away an hour too soon. They dawdled about among Swiss mountains, living a life of rustic simplicity that was probably beneficial to Constance, but somewhat painful to Lord Clanyarde. At the beginning of July they had established themselves at a lonely little village in the shadow of white solemn mountains, and here Constance felt as if she had passed beyond the region of actual life into a state of repose, a kind of painless purgatory. She had done with the world, and worldly interests and affections. Even the little stranger's heart must have been weaned from her by this time.

Lord Clanyarde saw the gradual decay of his daughter's strength, and trembled for the issue. She had grown dearer to him in this time of close com-

panionship than she had ever been since the far off days when she was little Connie, the youngest and loveliest of his daughters. He told himself that unless something occurred to rouse her from this dull apathy, this placid calm which looked like the forerunner of death's frozen stillness, there was every reason for fear, and but little ground for hope.

Lord Clanyarde prayed more earnestly than he had ever done before in his self-indulgent life, and it seemed to him by-and-by, that Providence had heard his cry for help.

One morning there came a letter from Rome which startled father and daughter alike. It was from Mrs. Walsingham, written in a tremulous hand, and addressed to Lord Clanyarde.

'They tell me I am dying, and the near approach of death has melted the ice about my heart. I have been a very wicked woman, and now conscience urges me to make you what poor reparation I can for a most cruel and treacherous revenge—not upon the man who wronged me, but upon the innocent girl for whose sake I was abandoned.

'I have deeply injured your daughter, Lord Clan-

yarde, and I meant to carry the secret of that wrong to the grave—to leave her desolate and childless to the end. But the long lonely nights—the pain and weariness of decay—the dreary seclusion from the busy outer world—these have done their work. Conscience, which had been deadened by anger and revenge, slowly awakened, and there came a longing for atonement. I can never undo what I have done. I can never give your daughter back the years that have been darkened by sorrow—her wasted tears—her vain regrets. But I may do something. Let her come to me—let her stand beside my death-bed, and I will whisper the story of my crime into her ear. I will not write it. She must come quickly if she wishes to hear what I have to tell, for death stares me in the face, and this letter may be long reaching you. Every day drifts me further down the dark river. How swiftly it rushes in the dreary night-watches. I sometimes fancy I hear the ripple of the tide, and the hollow moan of the great ocean that lies before me—the unknown sea of death and eternity.'

Here came a broken sentence, which Lord Clanyarde could not decipher; and it seemed to him that

the writer's mind had wandered, towards the close of the letter. There was no signature, but he knew the handwriting, and Mrs. Walsingham's address was stamped on the paper.

The letter had been more than a week on the road, and was re-addressed from the hotel where Lord Clanyarde and his daughter had stayed at the beginning of their tour.

'It's a curious business,' said Lord Clanyarde, doubtfully, after he had given Constance the letter. 'I believe her mind is affected, poor soul; and I really don't think you ought to go. Who can tell what she may say in her ravings? and not a vestige of truth in it, perhaps.'

He thought Mrs. Walsingham's death-bed confession might concern her relations with Gilbert Sinclair, and that it would be better for Constance to hear nothing the unhappy lady could tell.

'This letter bears the stamp of truth,' said Constance, firmly. 'I shall go, papa. Pray get a carriage, and let us start as quickly as possible.'

'But, my love, consider the unhealthiness of Rome at this time of year. We might as well go

and live in a fever hospital. The Pontine Marshes, you know, steaming with malaria. We should be digging our own graves.'

'You need not go there unless you like, papa, but I shall not lose an hour. She has something to confess —some wrong done me—something about Christabel, perhaps,' cried Constance, tremulous with excitement

'My dear girl, be calm; what can this lady know about Christabel?'

'I don't know, but I must hear what she has to tell. Wasted tears—vain regrets. That must mean that I have grieved needlessly. O, God, does it mean that my darling is still alive?'

'If you go on like this, Constance, you'll be in a burning fever before you get to Rome,' remonstrated Lord Clanyarde.

He saw that the only wise course was to yield to his daughter's wishes, and lost no time in making arrangements for the journey back to Rome. The apathy which had made him so anxious about Constance was quite gone. She was full of eagerness and excitement, and insisted on travelling as quickly as possible, foregoing all rest upon the journey.

They entered Rome in the summer sunset, the city looking beautiful as a dream. The atmosphere was cool and balmy, but Lord Clanyarde looked with a shudder at the silvery mists floating over the valleys, and fancied he saw the malaria fiend grinning at him behind that diaphanous veil. Constance thought of nothing but the purpose for which she had come.

'Tell the man to drive straight to Mrs. Walsingham's, papa,' she said, eagerly.

'But, my love, hadn't he better take us to the hotel? We had nothing but an omelette for breakfast, and a basket of peaches and a cup of chocolate on the road. I'm thoroughly exhausted. We won't stop for an elaborate dinner. A cutlet and a bottle of Bordeaux will be enough.'

'You can leave me at Mrs. Walsingham's and go on to the hotel to dine.'

'Never mind me, my love,' said Lord Clanyarde, resignedly. 'Since you're so anxious, we'll go and see this poor lady first; but a death-bed confession, you know, that must be a long business.'

He gave the direction to the driver, and the man

pulled up his tired horses before one of the stately palaces of the past.

Constance and her father ascended to the first floor. The house was full of shadows at this tranquil evening hour, and the staircase was dimly lighted by a lamp burning before a statue of the Virgin.

An Italian man-servant admitted them to an anteroom, lavishly decorated with pictures and bric-à-brac—a room in which Lord Clanyarde had eaten Neapolitan ices, or sipped coffee on those Saturday evenings which Mrs. Walsingham had made so agreeable to him. He had never seen the room empty before to-night, and it had a singularly desolate look to his fancy in the flickering light of a pair of wax candles that had burned down to the sockets of the Pompeian bronze candlesticks on the velvet-draped mantelpiece.

'How is your mistress?' Lord Clanyarde asked.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

'Alas, Excellency! it goes always the same. She still exists, that is all.'

'Tell her Mrs. Sinclair has come from Switzerland in the hope of seeing her.'

The Italian summoned Mrs. Walsingham's maid, who requested Constance to come at once to the sick room. She was expected, the woman said. But she must prepare herself to be shocked by Mrs. Walsingham's appearance. Her end seemed near.

'You had better go to your hotel, papa,' said Constance. 'I may have to stay here a long time. You can come back for me by-and-by.'

On reflection Lord Clanyarde considered this the best arrangement. He really wanted his dinner. Indeed, he had never yet found any crisis in life so solemn as to obliterate that want.

The servant led the way through a suite of reception-rooms to a tall door at the end of a spacious saloon. This opened into Mrs. Walsingham's bedroom, which was the last room on this side of the house; a noble chamber, with windows looking two ways—one towards the distant hills, the other over the stately roofs and temples of the city. Both windows were wide open, and there was no light in the room save the rosy glow of sunset. The bed was in an alcove, voluminously draped with amber damask and Roman lace. Mrs. Walsingham was in a sitting

position, propped up with pillows, facing the sunglow beyond the purple hills.

There was a second door opening on to the staircase, and as Constance entered some one—a man—left the room by this door. She supposed that this person must be one of Mrs. Walsingham's medical attendants. The doctors were hovering about her no doubt in these last hours.

'You have come,' gasped the dying woman; 'thank God. You can go, Morris,' to the maid; 'I will ring if I want you. Come here, Mrs. Sinclair. Sit down by my side. There is no time to lose. My breath fails me very often. You must excuse—be patient.'

'Pray do not distress yourself,' said Constance, seating herself in the chair beside the bed, 'I can stay as long as you like.'

'How gently you speak to me! But you don't know! You will look at me differently presently—not with those compassionate eyes. I am an awful spectacle, am I not?—living death! Would you believe that I was once a beauty? Sant painted my portrait, when we were both at our best——' with a bitter little laugh.

'I have not lost an hour in coming to you,' said Constance. 'If you have done me a wrong that you can by any means repair, pray do not lose time.'

'Death is waiting at my door. Yes, I must be quick. But it is so horrible to talk of. It was such mean, low treachery. Not a great revenge ;—a pitiful, paltry act of spitefulness. Oh, if you knew how I loved Gilbert Sinclair, how firmly I believed in his love! Yes, and he was fond of me, until the luckless day you crossed his path and stole his heart from me.'

'I never knew——' faltered Constance.

'No, you wronged me ignorantly, but that did not make my loss lighter to bear. I hated you for it. Yes, I measured my hatred for you by my love for him. Life was intolerable to me without him, and one day I vowed that I would make your life intolerable to you. I was told that you were making an idol of your child, that your happiness was bound up in that baby's existence, and I resolved that the child should be taken from you——'

'Wretch!' cried Constance, starting up in sudden horror. 'You were there—at Schönesthal—you pushed her down the slope—it was not accident——'

'No, no. I was not quite so bad as that—not capable of taking that sweet young life. To take her from you, that was enough. To make your days miserable—to make you drink the cup of tears, as I had done—because of you. *That* was my end and aim. I found a willing tool in your French nurse-maid, a skilful coadjutor in James Wyatt. Everything was well planned. The girl had learned to swim the year before at Ostend, and was not afraid to plunge into the river when she saw some one coming. This gave a look of reality to the business. I met Melanie Duport at the ruins that September morning, and took your baby from her. I carried her away in my own arms to the place where a carriage was waiting for me, and drove straight to Baden, and from Baden travelled as fast as I could to Brussels, keeping the baby in my own charge all the while.'

'She was not drowned, then. Thank God—thank God!' cried Constance, sinking on her knees beside the bed, and lifting up her heart in praise and thanksgiving. Of Mrs. Walsingham's guilt—of the sorrow she had endured—she hardly thought in this moment of delight.

'Where is she—my darling, my angel? What have you done with her? Where have you hidden her all this time?'

A wan smile crept over the ashen face of the dying sinner.

'We are strange creatures, we women—mysteries even to ourselves,' she said. 'I took your child away from you; and, hearing you were dying broken-hearted, gave her back to you. Your old lover pleaded strongly. I gave the little one into Sir Cyprian Davenant's keeping. I know no more.'

'Then I was not deceived. My Christabel! It was my Christabel they brought back to me! The instinct of a mother's heart was not a delusion and a snare.'

'Can you pity—pardon?' faltered Mrs. Walsingham.

'Yes, I forgive you for all—for months of blank, hopeless grief—all—because of what you have told me to-night. If you had taken this secret to the grave—if I had never known—I should have gone on steeling my heart against my darling—I should have thrust her from me—left her motherless in

this cruel world, and thought that I was doing my duty. Yes, I forgive. You have wronged me cruelly. And it was heartless—treacherous—abominable—what you did at Schönesthal. But I forgive you all for the sake of this blessed moment. May God pardon and pity you, as I do!'

'You are an angel,' sighed Mrs. Walsingham, stretching out a feeble hand, which Constance pressed tenderly in both her own.

Death is a great healer of bygone wrongs.

'And will you forgive the friend who brought you your own child, believing that he was bringing you a stranger, and who experimentalized with your maternal love, in the hope of winning you from the grave?'

'You mean Sir Cyprian Davenant?' said Constance.

'Yes.'

'I felt very angry with him when my father told me what he had done, but I have felt since that all he did was done out of affection for an old friend. I have nothing to forgive.'

'I am glad to hear you say that. Sir Cyprian has returned from Africa, after a successful expedition. He is in Rome.'

Constance's pale cheek grew a shade paler.

'He is in Rome, and has paid me many visits in this sick room. He has talked to me of your gentleness—your divine compassion. But for that I do not think I should ever have had the courage to send for you——'

'I thank him with all my heart,' exclaimed Constance.

'Let your lips thank him too,' said Mrs. Walsingham, touching the spring bell on the little table by her side.

She struck the bell three times, and at the third chime the door opened and Cyprian Davenant came in. It was he who had withdrawn quietly at Mrs. Sinclair's entrance, and whom she had mistaken for the doctor.

'She has forgiven all,' said Mrs. Walsingham. 'You were right when you called her an angel. And now let me do one good thing on my death-bed. Let me be sure that the rest of her life will be bright and happy, that there will be a strong arm and a true heart between her and sorrow. It will help to lift the burden from my conscience if I can be sure of that.'

Constance spoke not a word. She stood before her first lover blushing like a schoolgirl. She dared not lift her eyes to his face.

Happily there was little need of words.

Cyprian put his arm round the slender figure, in its dismal black dress, and drew the love of years to his breast.

'God has been very good to us, my darling,' he said. 'May He never part us any more! I think He meant us to live and die together.'

Constance did not question this assertion. Her heart mutely echoed her lover's words.

* * * * * *

In the early spring of the following year Davenant Park awoke like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and the comfortable old servants, who had grown fat and sleek during their period of comparative idleness rejoiced and made merry at the coming home of their master. They had known him from his boyhood, and to them this raising up of the old family to more than its former prosperity was like a personal elevation. Even the neighbouring villages had their share in the gladness, and there were more bonfires and

triumphal arches between the railway station and the park gates on the evening of Sir Cyprian's return with his beautiful wife, Lord Clanyarde's daughter, than had ever been seen before by the oldest inhabitant.

Baby Christabel was waiting to welcome them on the threshold of the old oak-panelled hall; and Martha Briggs, resplendent in a new silk gown, declared that this was the happiest day of her life, an assertion which Luke Gibson, the head gamekeeper, resented as a personal affront.

'Bar one, Patty,' he remonstrated. 'I should think your own wedding-day ought to be still happier when it comes.'

'No, it won't,' cried Martha, decidedly; 'and I think you ought to know, Jim, that I never would have given my consent to get married if my mistress hadn't——'

'Set you the example,' cried Luke, with a guffaw. 'And a very good example it is, too. Sir Cyprian has promised me the new lodge at the south gate—five rooms and a scullery. That's the missus's doing, I'll be bound!'

THE END.

# IN GREAT WATERS.

# IN GREAT WATERS.

THERE were two of them—Jeanne and Marie, sisters, —both pretty girls, but the beauty of the younger had a tender spiritual grace that went straight to the heart, and charmed more deeply than the richer bloom of the elder. This sweeter, more bewitching of the two was Marie. They were mere peasants, the daughters of Jean Holbert, a storm-beaten old fisherman, who lived on the outskirts of Nercy, a small sea-coast town in Normandy. Jeanne was a slim, dark-eyed girl of two-and-twenty. Marie was pale, with soft hazel eyes and chestnut hair, and only just eighteen. They were very fond of each other, and worked together at lace-making, which they had been taught by the kind sisters of a convent, whose sugar-loaf towers rose in the back ground of the

little town. The house had been a nobleman's *château* once, had been a good deal knocked about during the first Revolution, and had rather a dilapidated air, but was a pleasant feature of the homely scene for all that. The sisters had taught these girls a good deal besides lace-making. They could read and write well, and were altogether in advance of the peasant class.

It would have been strange if between two pretty girls there had not been at least one lover. There was: a neighbour's son, one Henri Latouche, the eldest of a numerous hard-working family, a tall broad-shouldered fellow of eight-and-twenty, with frank blue eyes and a pleasant smile; a man who lived by the same perilous trade as that of Jean Holbert, reaping the uncertain harvest of the sea. The sisters had many a mournful day and evening when those two were out upon the wide waters, and the driving rain and wind beat against the narrow panes of their window. A hard life, and a hazardous one, and a trade that brought in so little—just enough to sustain existence in the simple household.

Poor as they were, however, there was nothing sordid or miserable in their poverty. The two girls were capital managers. The poor mother, a good hard-working soul, who now slept the sleep of the righteous in the quiet little cemetery just outside the town, had taught them all the useful domestic arts. They were bright, industrious young creatures; and the poor little weather-beaten cottage was the very pink of cleanliness. The low-ceiled room, half kitchen, half parlour, with a great wooden bedstead like a family tomb in a dark corner, shone and sparkled with its few brasses and coppers, its modest show of crockery, neatly arranged on the numerous shelves of the cupboard, its gay-looking chintz window-curtain, and comfortable arm-chair, where the dear old father sat on those happy nights when he was not out at sea.

On such evenings as these Henri Latouche was apt to drop in, and was always made welcome by the old man. The girls would go on with their work—the little household could scarcely have held together so comfortably without the profit from that lace-work—while Henri read a two-days-old newspaper

to them in his fresh young voice, or told them any small fragments of news he had picked up in the town: how the widow Bonnechose was going to marry again, though her last husband had been dead only fifteen months; how Louis Delmont's pretty fair-haired child had strayed away and been lost that afternoon, and only recovered at sunset, when the mother had grown well-nigh distracted with fear. Such homely scraps of gossip interested the old fisherman and his daughters; and the news in the Rouen paper was something to be heard with open eyes and eager curiosity.

One bright, calm evening, late in April, Jeanne sat alone in the little cottage. Marie had gone out for a walk, to carry some lace to the *château* on the side of the hill, where the girls had a liberal patroness in Mademoiselle Renée, only daughter and heiress of the Comte de Marsac, the great man of the neighbourhood. There was no fishing to-night; Jean Holbert had strolled into the town, tempted by the fine weather, to have a chat with some of his old comrades; and Henri—well, Jeanne did not know where Henri was—in the town also perhaps, with her

father. He must needs have been occupied, or he would most likely have looked in at the cottage, Jeanne thought.

They had been brought up together, those two, almost like brother and sister. When Henri was a great hulking boy of sixteen, and Jeanne a smart little damsel of ten, she had taught him to write; and it was a pleasant sight to see the big awkward boy submitting himself to the teaching of the little eager dark-eyed girl, and laughing heartily at his own stupidity. It was a difficult business, but pupil and teacher had persevered gallantly. Henri owed it to Jeanne that he was a tolerable penman, owed it to her also that he read as well as he did; for it was she who had made him improve his rudimentary knowledge of his own language in its printed form.

She was thinking of him this evening as she sat by the open window, working busily in the fading light, considering the waste of her eyesight a lesser evil than the consumption of candles. She was thinking how brave and good Henri was, how kind to her father, how frank and truthful, how infinitely

superior to any other young man in the place; she was thinking of him with a touch of sadness, for it seemed to her that there had been a sort of distant feeling between them of late, though he came so often, and was so friendly. She could scarcely tell what the change was. But the old affectionate familiarity, the loving confidence of those unforgotten days when she had guided the clumsy fingers along the lines of the copy book, had gone for ever. It was not that Henri and she had quarrelled; no angry word had ever passed between them; but there was a change, and Jeanne Holbert felt it.

He would scarcely come to-night, she said to herself as she laid aside her work. It was growing late. She went to the open door, and looked down the road. No, there was no sign of Henri.

There was a faint yellow light still lingering low in the west, and high up in the clear blue sky a few stars were glimmering—a lovely night, with a perfect calm that had a saddening influence on the heart. Jeanne felt this as she stood at the cottage door watching.

She was not watching for the chance of Henri's coming, but for her sister, who was sure to return

presently. Marie came round the bend in the road in a few minutes—not alone. How well Jeanne knew the tall broad-shouldered figure by her side!

Her heart beat a little faster—she was scarcely conscious of it herself; but of late, since that widening of the distance between them, Henri's coming had always moved her thus.

They were quite silent as they came towards the cottage door. There was none of the accustomed talk or laughter; and Marie was very pale. Henri would not come in; he could not wait to see Jean Holbert; he only stopped to shake hands with Jeanne, and then wished the two girls good night, and walked quickly away.

Marie sat down upon a chair near the door, and took off her little shawl, and began to fold it with extreme precision. The evening light shone full upon her delicate face. There was something the matter—Jeanne could see that.

'Mademoiselle Renée was so kind—so kind,' the girl, said in a quick nervous way; 'and she likes the lace very much. We are to make some more of the same pattern—half a dozen yards. And I saw the

gentleman Mademoiselle is to marry—such a handsome man! They will be a fine couple, won't they, Jeanne?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' Jeanne answered, absently. 'I thought you were going to the *château* alone, Marie. How came Henri to be with you?'

Marie bent over the shawl, which she had been folding and smoothing out all this time. It was only a little bit of a shawl to require so much folding.

'Well, you see, Jeanne, I was talking of going to the *château* when Henri was here last night; and as he had nothing to do this evening, there he was on the road, just beyond here, waiting to walk with me. He said it was rather a lonely walk for me, and I oughtn't to go by myself.'

'He was very kind,' Jeanne answered, in a voice that sounded cold and strange to her sister; 'but I don't think that I am very careless about your safety, or that I would let you go if there was any danger in the road. It isn't such a new thing for you to go alone either, Marie.'

The girl blushed, and a shy smile came into her face as she looked up at her sister.

'Well, Jeanne, I suppose the real truth was, Henri wanted to walk with me.'

'I suppose so,' the other answered, in the same constrained tone.

She was standing by the open window, with her elbow resting on the broad wooden ledge, looking out at the darkening sky. The two girls could scarcely see each other's faces in the dusky room, where there was only the faint glow of the tiny wood fire.

'Jeanne, would you be very much surprised if I were to tell you something?' Marie asked, still very shyly.

'That depends upon what it is.'

'You like Henri Latouche, don't you?'

'Like him! I have known him all my life.'

'That's no answer, Jeanne. Tell me if you like him.'

'Yes.'

'Because—because he wants me to marry him, dear; and I shouldn't care to marry any one you didn't like.'

There was a brief silence before Jeanne spoke.

'I don't know about that,' she said at last; 'I

don't think my liking can matter to you much, if you love him yourself.'

'Oh, of course *I* like him,' Marie answered, rather carelessly, as if it were not a matter of very much importance. 'He's such a good fellow.'

'He *is* a good fellow.'

'So good-natured and good-tempered, and would let one do what one liked. It's rather funny to think of him as my husband though, isn't it, Jeanne? I have always felt as if he were my big brother.'

'Then you have promised to marry him, Marie?'

'Well, yes. He teased me so, I was obliged to promise at last; and he really is such a good fellow.'

Jeanne took a candle from the mantelpiece, and knelt down on the hearth to light it. Then she crossed the little room with the candle in her hand, and held it before her sister's face, looking at her very earnestly.

'I want to see if you are serious, Marie,' she said gently. 'Marriage is such a solemn thing, and you speak of it so lightly.'

'My dearest Jeanne, but really I don't see why I should be so very serious. Of course I like him very

much—he is such a dear good fellow : and I am to be his wife instead of his little sister, that's all. It won't make so much difference. Do you know, Jeanne, that he has actually saved money? and he says he will take that cottage looking towards the sea, with a fig tree against the wall, and a wooden balcony to the upper window, the cottage old Dame Margot lived in so long—quite a *château* in its way.'

Jeanne put the candle on the table, and took up her work with that grave preoccupied air which she had at times—a manner that always puzzled her sister.

'You might wish me joy, Jeanne. You're so silent. It seems almost unkind,' Marie said, reproachfully.

Jeanne bent low over her work as she answered,—

'I think you ought to know that I wish for your happiness, Marie,' she said quietly; 'but you've taken me by surprise. I didn't think you cared for Henri.'

'Why, of course, I didn't care for him—except as a brother—until to-night. But he pleaded so,

Jeanne. If I'd been a lady, he couldn't have been more humble—and he is such a dear good fellow.'

She always came back to this point, as if it were an unanswerable argument.

'If you love him, Marie—if you are sure you love him—that's enough. What could I wish more than that—what can I wish for in this world so much as your happiness? You remember what I promised our mother when she was dying: that, come what might, I would always make your happiness my first care.'

'And I'm sure you've kept your word, you dear unselfish Jeanne. You've been a second mother to me, though there's only four years' difference between us.'

The younger girl came and knelt at her sister's feet, resting her folded arms upon Jeanne's knees, and looking up at her with that bewitching smile of hers.

'Tell me that you are pleased, dear,' she said; 'I cannot be happy without that.'

'I am pleased with anything that can secure your happiness, Marie; but I want to be quite

sure of that, and it seems so sudden—this engagement between you and Henri.'

'Sudden? Bless you, Jeanne, he's been in love with me ever since I was as high as that!' answered Marie, putting her hand about two feet from the floor, and with a triumphant look in her bright face.

It was her first victory over the vassal man, and she was proud of her power. The time came when it seemed to her a very poor conquest, scarcely worth thinking of; but just now she felt a pleasant sense of her own importance, a childish delight in the notion that this stalwart young fisherman was her slave.

So it was all settled. Jean Holbert came in from the town presently, and was told the great news—in a pretty, faltering, broken way by Marie, in a few straightforward sentences by Jeanne. He was pleased at the tidings, and quite ready to give his consent.

'I felt pretty sure that he was in love with one of you,' he said cheerily, 'but I didn't trouble my poor old head to find out which. It would all come

out in time, I knew. And so it's Marie, is it?—my little Marie! Why, you're scarcely more than a child, little one. The marriage mustn't be yet awhile.'

'I'm sure I'm in no hurry, father. But there's old widow Margot's cottage to let—you know, father; the pretty one facing the sea, with a wooden balcony,—and perhaps some one else will take it if we're not married soon.'

'There are plenty of cottages besides that, pretty one, and Henri could build you a balcony. You needn't be in a hurry to leave your poor old father.—The place would seem dull without her wouldn't it, Jeanne?'

'Very dull.'

'Of course it would. There mustn't be any talk of this marriage for a year at least. Not for two years if I had my way.'

'You must settle that with Henri, father,' the girl answered, standing on tiptoe to kiss him. '*I* don't want to leave you.'

They were engaged, therefore; but the marriage was not to be yet awhile. Everything went on

just the same as usual. In all their little world there seemed no change, except to one person, and that person was Jeanne. For her the change was a great and bitter one. She knew now that she had loved Henri Latouche all her life.

However heavy her burden might be, she bore it, and made no sign. From her earliest childhood hers had been a life of care and toil and thought for others. It did not seem to her a settled thing that she was to be happy and win the prize she longed for, as it is apt to seem to the impetuous heart of youth. She had loved the companion of her childhood, and there had been a time when she fancied her love returned. He had chosen otherwise, and she was able to resign him to her sister without one rebellious murmur against Providence. But there was one thing she could not do: she could not feel sure that Marie loved him.

The girl was very young and light-hearted. It was only natural, perhaps, that she should take life carelessly, that she should not feel very seriously even upon the subject of her betrothal; but Jeanne found this indifference a hard thing to understand.

Sometimes, when Henri Latouche was out fishing on stormy days, the elder sister would sit and watch the face of the younger wonderingly. He who should have been all the world to her was in peril, and she sat singing at her work. If Jeanne spoke of him, or called her attention to the cruel wind rattling the little casement, a faint cloud of trouble would pass over her face, but that was all. The work and the song went on again afterwards, or perhaps some idle gossip about Mademoiselle de Marsac, who wore the loveliest white muslin dresses trimmed with lace and ribbon, or silks that were rich enough to stand alone.

'She ought to be very happy, oughtn't she, Jeanne?' Marie said sometimes, with a sigh. 'She has an Arab horse that the Count bought her. One of the grooms showed him to me the other day, when I had been to the kitchen to see Justine and came out by the stables. A beautiful gray, with a coat that shines like satin. And she has such jewels! —more than you could reckon, Justine told me. And this Monsieur de Lutrin whom she is going to marry is always bringing her something beauti-

ful from Paris. What a fine thing it is to be an heiress!'

The *château* was Marie Holbert's one glimpse of the great world. It seemed to her that in all France, in all the universe, there could be no habitation more splendid than that old white-walled Norman mansion, with its tall sugar-loaf towers, the broad terraces, where roses and geraniums bloomed in perennial beauty, and where moss-grown statues of Apollo and Diana, Ceres and Pan, slowly mouldered to decay; the spacious rooms, with their faded tapestries, and tarnished gilding, and rococo furniture, and polished floors, with a square of rich Persian carpet here and there, like some tropical flowery islet in a shining brown sea. It was the only great house the fisherman's daughter had ever seen, and there was something in the aspect of the place that took her breath away. It was all so different from her own surroundings. To enter it was to find oneself in quite another world. Mademoiselle Renée's tall, stately figure, with that background of lofty saloon, seemed to her like the picture of a fairy princess in an enchanted palace.

This young lady was very kind to her, paying her promptly for her work, and giving her little presents now and then; sometimes detaining her at the château for an hour or so, sometimes inviting her to share a pleasant afternoon meal of coffee and fruit and cakes with her own maid Justine, in a pretty circular room in one of the towers where the maid sat and worked. Marie thought it was a happy thing to be Justine, and live always in that splendid château. It made her own life seem ruder and commoner to her when she went home after these little festivals. Her evening walk with Henri Latouche wearied her. Sometimes, as they came home between the orchard hedgerows in the twilight, they saw the lights shining in the windows of the château on the hill, and Marie used to wonder what Mademoiselle was doing in the great saloon, with her weak, indulgent old father, and the fragile invalid mother, who seldom left her sofa, and the noble, handsome young lover. Perhaps Mademoiselle was quite as dull as Marie with *her* lover, could the peasant girl have only known the truth. Faded tapestry and dim yellow satin

hangings—nay, even tarnished ormolu and rare old cabinets of buhl and marqueterie—do not create happiness; and, sooth to say, life at the *château* was somewhat monotonous. Mamma had her chronic maladies, of which she thought more than of her daughter; papa his perpetual *Journal des Débats* and snuff-box. There were very few visitors. It was a life that went on repeating itself from year to year —calm, eventless, and stupid.

Unfortunately, Marie had no power to see this side of the picture. Mademoiselle de Marsac's surroundings dazzled her; and Mademoiselle de Marsac's lover—oh, how different he was from Henri Latouche, with his big clumsy hands, his honest weather-beaten face, and his rough peasant clothes, which always smelt of the sea!

One sultry afternoon in the middle of July, when Marie Holbert and Henri Latouche had been betrothed just three months, the girl went upon one of her accustomed visits to the *château*. It was rather an oppressive day, with a feverish heat in the atmosphere and a hint of a coming thunder-storm. The roses on the terrace seemed to loll

their heads heavily. The *château* itself had a drowsy look— the Venetian shutters closed, a muslin curtain here and there flapping faintly with every feeble sigh of the south-west wind.

Mademoiselle de Marsac was not visible; she had a headache, and was lying down in her own room, Justine told Marie Holbert. The two girls loitered a little in the shady hall to gossip, and then Marie walked slowly away from the cool dark *château* into the shadowless gardens. There was little sunshine this afternoon—a lurid glow rather, which seemed like the sweltering heat of a furnace. There was a way across the gardens to a small wooden door opening into the high road, which saved some distance, and Justine had told Marie she could go by this way. It was a day upon which any one would be glad to shorten a journey, if by ever so little.

Marie Holbert had never seen so much of the gardens before, often as she had been to the *château*, but she knew the door in the thick white wall very well. She had looked at it often from the outside as she mounted the hill, and had wondered

idly whether it was ever used. She was quite overpowered by the idea of exploring so much of this earthly paradise alone.

There was not very much to see in the *château* gardens, after all, beautiful as they appeared to Marie. It was only a repetition of geometrical flower-beds and sunburnt grass, and here and there a dilapidated statue. There were few trees; none of the cool shadowy beauties, the verdant mysteries of an English garden. With a few headstones and monuments scattered about, the sunny slope would have made an excellent cemetery.

Halfway between the *château* and the point to which she was going, Marie came to a circle of scarlet geraniums and a great marble basin which had once been a fountain. There was no sparkling jet of water now leaping gaily upward in the sunshine; only the chipped old basin, discoloured with damp and moss. But Marie gave a little start on approaching it; for on the edge of the basin there sat a gentleman smoking, in the laziest attitude possible, with one leg stretched along the broad marble border, and the other knee raised to make

a support for his elbow. It was Monsieur de Lutrin —Hector de Lutrin, the affianced of Mademoiselle.

He, too, gave a little start as Marie came near, and seemed to come to life all at once, as it were, changing his lazy attitude for one of attention.

'Great Heaven!' he muttered to himself, 'it is the little lace-girl! She comes expressly to amuse me.'

He rose and came forward to meet the little lace-girl, with his half-consumed cigar held daintily between his slim fingers. He was a fragile-looking young man, whose strong points were his hands and feet and a languid patrician air. He was not really handsome. His pale face and light grey eyes had a faded look; but his dark-brown moustache, and a certain grace of costume and manner, relieved his insipidity of feature and complexion.

He was the first gentleman, except the old Comte de Marsac, who had ever spoken to Marie Holbert, and he seemed to her a demigod.

'You have had a useless journey to the *château* this intolerable day, I fear, Mademoiselle,' he said. 'Mademoiselle Renée is ill.'

'I am so sorry!' Marie faltered, blushing and confused.

To be spoken to by any stranger was a bewildering thing; but by the betrothed of Mademoiselle —this adorable young man!

'It is not a matter of moment, happily,' he replied, lightly, giving the half-smoked cigar a little wave in the air. 'She has the *migraine*—this abominable weather, no doubt. Look what a leaden hue the sky has yonder. We are going to have a thunderstorm. Had you not better go back to the house?'

'Oh, no, Monsieur. You are very good, but I shall be wanted at home.'

'Foolish child! If you attempt to go home, you will be caught in the storm. Are you not afraid of thunder and lightning?'

'No, Monsieur, not afraid. I don't like to be out in the lightning; but—but I think there will be time for me to get home before it begins.'

'You are wrong, my little one. See, there is no mistaking that leaden cloud.'

'Indeed, Monsieur, I must go straight home at any hazard.'

'Very well. If you are obstinate, you must go; but remember I have warned you. However, I'll open the gate for you, and then you had better run home as fast as you can.'

He turned and walked with her towards the gate,—she shy and troubled by so much politeness, he with that easy air which was his chief grace; but before they reached the gate great raindrops came splashing down, and then a blinding shower, a perfect sheet of water.

'We're in for it!' exclaimed Monsieur de Lutrin. 'It's no use trying to go back to the *château*—we should be drowned before we could get there; but there's a tool house a few paces from here, where we can take shelter. Come, Mademoiselle.'

He led the half-bewildered girl along a narrow sandy path, past the door in the wall, to a rustic building sacred to the gardeners. The door was luckily open, and they went in, out of a very deluge. It was a roomy but darksome shed, containing gardening implements of all kinds, and a good deal of litter in the way of seeds and herbs, laid aside to dry. There was only one little window

looking upon the broad treeless garden, where flowers and shrubs were being beaten to the ground under the furious rain.

'It served me right,' Marie said, remorsefully. 'My sister begged me not to come to-day.'

'Very sensible advice of your sister's,' said Hector de Lutrin; 'but I am glad you did not take it.'

The girl was going to ask him why, but a look in his eyes checked her—a look that she had never met in the eyes of her lover, an expression that brought a vivid blush to her cheeks, and yet was not altogether displeasing, it was a look of such unalloyed admiration. Her heart beat a little faster than before, and the long dark lashes drooped over the pretty eyes.

'Because if you had taken your admirable sister's advice, I should have lost a most exquisite pleasure,' he went on, in his slow, languid way.

A blinding flash of lightning gave Marie an excuse for turning her head aside suddenly just at this moment; but the searching gaze of Monsieur de Lutrin's gray eyes was more embarrassing than the lightning.

But Marie recovered herself presently, and made very much the sort of reply that any young woman in society might have given her admirer.

'I don't think there can be much pleasure in being kept a prisoner in such a place as this,' she said.

'That depends upon one's companion. There is some company in which any place is delightful. Do you know, Marie, I have often wished to have a little talk with you, only at the *château* it was not possible. Would you have a very great objection to my cigar, by the way, if I were to light it again? This place has such a damp smell.'

Marie had no objection to the cigar, which Monsieur de Lutrin proceeded to light; but she felt suddenly eager to make her escape. It was very flattering, of course, this attention from Mademoiselle Renée's betrothed, and Marie's heart was flattered by an almost overwhelming sense of gratified vanity; but she knew very well that it was not right—not right either to Mademoiselle Renée or to her own honest weather-beaten lover.

'I don't think it is raining so fast now,' she said; 'I had better make haste home.'

'Silly child! it is raining just as fast as ever. Hark at the thunder. There's an awful crackling noise, just as if it came from the road behind us! And what lightning! You cannot leave this refuge till the storm is over. I am sorry it is not a better place, and I am still more sorry you find it so dismal. For me it is a paradise in little.'

And so he went on, smoking his cigar in that slow, desultory way of his, and paying elaborate compliments to the poor little peasant girl. He had no iniquitous design, no treasonable intentions against the peace of the little lace-girl or his betrothed; he only wanted to amuse himself this dull summer afternoon by a harmless flirtation. The thought of any mischief that might arise from his caprice gave him no trouble. He was not in the habit of perplexing himself upon the subject of other people's feelings. If the little lace-girl permitted herself to be too much impressed by him, that was her look-out. His own conscience found perfect repose in the fact that he meant nothing.

Marie Holbert listened to him. What could she do but listen, with the rain still pouring down, and

the thunderstorm at its worst? She had no excuse for running away; so she stayed and listened to talk which was commonplace enough, but dangerously delightful to her.

He asked her questions about her life, praised the colour of her eyes, told her how much too pretty she was for a life of hard work—as if it were only the ill-favoured of this earth to whom the heritage of toil was given. He said enough to make her thoroughly discontented and unhappy, presently, when the storm was over, and he had escorted her through the garden door and as far as a bend in the hilly road, just above the town, where he left her.

When he was gone, it seemed as if the whole aspect of her life was changed. The thought of the smoky little cottage, to which she was returning, made her shudder; the thought of her lover's evening visit was still more distasteful to her. The poison was subtle, and gave its flavour to everything. How handsome, how charming he was, this elegant Parisian gentleman, who had praised her beauty! Was she really so pretty? Henri Latouche had said very little about her good looks. He had talked of his

love for her, but not of the colour of her eyes. At best he was rather a stupid lover.

She was absent-minded, and had a somewhat melancholy air, that evening when Henri came, and told them the news, and read the paper to the old father in his usual way. She gave him a random answer more than once. Her thoughts were in the rustic shed, with its one little window, against which the rain had beaten so furiously. Henri was puzzled by her manner.

Marie Holbert had occasion to go to the *château* again two days afterwards. It was always she who went to and fro with the lace or any message about it. Jeanne knew that her sister was Mademoiselle de Marsac's favourite, and Jeanne had always so much to do at home. The two girls did all Mademoiselle's plain work, as well as the lace-making; and just now there was a great deal of work on hand for the trousseau. The marriage was to take place in October; and after her marriage, Mademoiselle was to go and live in Paris, for Monsieur de Lutrin could not exist away from Paris. He was rich and idle—an only son, who

had inherited a handsome fortune lately,—and the marriage had been arranged ever so long ago between the two fathers.

There was no fear of a thunderstorm this time. The *château* gardens were all ablaze with sunshine. To-day Mademoiselle Renée was visible. Justine took Marie to her boudoir, where they had a long discussion about the needlework. Marie had half expected to see Monsieur de Lutrin here, turning over loose sheets of music, or teasing Mademoiselle's favourite poodle, after his wont; but he was not in the boudoir to-day.

The talk about the work lasted more than an hour. Renée de Marsac was especially gracious, and insisted that Marie should have a glass of sugared water and a biscuit after her walk; and at parting she said,—

'Be sure you go across the gardens, child, and out by the little door—it is always unlocked,—and that way will save you a quarter of a mile.'

Marie blushed crimson. Could she ever forget that short cut across the garden, and the wonderful adventure that had befallen her? She left the house

in a strange dreamy state. Should she see him again? As she came near the dilapidated fountain, it seemed to her that the earth beneath her feet grew impalpable all at once, as if she had been walking on air.

Yes, there he was, in precisely the same attitude, smoking and gazing listlessly at the horizon, across the blue hill-tops. He looked as if he had never moved since she had first seen him sitting there two days before.

He heard her steps upon the loose gravel, and rose to meet her, throwing the end of his cigar into the empty marble basin. It was only a repetition of their last meeting. His compliments were very much the same—just a little more fervid, perhaps; but that was all. To a woman of the world it would all have seemed insipid and commonplace enough; but it was the first tribute that had ever been paid by a gentleman to Marie Holbert's beauty, and the poor little feeble soul had no power to resist the fascination. He was a gentleman—that was the beginning and end of the charm.

He walked with her to the bend of the road

again, but did not care to go beyond that point, for a few yards farther would have brought them into the town; and, harmless as Monsieur de Lutrin meant his flirtation to be, he did not want to advertise it to all the world of Nercy.

Just as they came to this bend of the road, a slight girlish figure advanced towards them with a firm steady walk that Marie knew very well. She gave a great start, and in her sudden confusion clung to Hector de Lutrin's arm. Not till this moment had she any positive sense of guilt; but the sight of that familiar figure, coming along the road, was like a revelation. What would Jeanne say?

'Why, what ails thee, little one?' asked Monsieur de Lutrin, looking down at the frightened face with an expression of mingled wonder and annoyance in his own. That spasmodic clutch of Marie's had startled him unpleasantly, for he was of a nervous temperament.

'It is my sister Jeanne!' Marie said, with a gasp.

'What then? Thy sister Jeanne will not eat us.'

'Great Heaven! what will she think? She will be so angry! What shall I say?'

Jeanne was quite near them by this time. Monsieur de Lutrin came to a full stop, raised his hat to the highest ceremonial elevation, and made a bow which included the two sisters.

'I have the honour to wish you good day, Mademoiselle,' he said to Marie; and then he strolled slowly back up the hill towards the *château*.

Marie had grown pale to the lips. Never in all her life had she feared any one as she feared her sister Jeanne to-day. For some minutes the two girls walked on in silence; and then Jeanne spoke, in a voice that was very grave—nay, almost stern, but which trembled a little nevertheless.

'How came Monsieur de Lutrin to be with you just now, Marie?' she asked.

'I don't know. It was quite an accident, of course. Mademoiselle told me to come through the garden—to the little door, you know, Jeanne, that opens on the hill; and I happened to meet Monsieur, and he walked with me.'

'Do you think it right, Marie, that a gentleman like that should walk by your side, just as if you were equals?'

'I don't see anything wrong in it.'

'Then why were you so frightened when you saw me coming? I saw you grasp Monsieur's arm as if you had seen a ghost.'

'It was very foolish of me,' Marie answered, in rather a defiant manner. 'There was no reason that I should be frightened.'

'Except that people seldom like to be found out doing wrong. What do you think Henri would say if he had seen you two together?'

'I do not think anything about it, or care anything about it. And I hope that is the end of your lecture, Jeanne.'

She had never defied her sister before; the sister who, for the last six years of her life, had watched and guarded her with a mother's care.

Jeanne said no more. It was not such a great crime, after all, that Marie had been guilty of; but there had been something in the manner of those two that alarmed Jeanne. They had been talking

so confidentially until Marie saw her. It could scarcely be the first time they had talked together. And then Marie's unmistakable terror was such a strange thing.

'Was to-day the first time that Monsieur de Lutrin walked with you?' Jeanne asked by-and-by; but Marie evaded the question, declaring that she would not submit to be lectured. Her heart was beating very fast, half with fear, half with anger, and she felt herself very wicked—almost as if she had given herself over to iniquity.

After this Jeanne took care that Marie should pay no more visits to the *château*. Henceforward it was Jeanne herself who went to carry home work, or to take Mademoiselle de Marsac's orders. But a fine gentleman who had lived the life of Paris was, of course, more than a match for a simple peasant girl; and it generally happened that while Jeanne was up the hill at the *château*, Monsieur de Lutrin dropped in at the cottage, to ask for a cup of cider, and to talk for half an hour or so with Marie.

Opposition gave a zest to the flirtation. If the girl had been thrown constantly in his way he might

have wearied of her before this; but the sister's precautions gave the business the flavour of an intrigue, and Monsieur de Lutrin had found life very monotonous at the *château*.

Jean Holbert's cottage stood on the extreme edge of the town, and a little aloof from the other habitations that were thinly sprinkled along the broad white road; had there been nearer neighbours, those visits of the fine gentleman from the *château* might have created a scandal. They would ultimately have done so as it was, perhaps, had not the course of events taken another turn.

Monsieur de Lutrin had suffered himself to be drifted away from that idea of meaning nothing serious, with which he had begun his flirtation. Marie was so much in earnest. The sweet young face expressed so much more than the poor child was conscious of. Those sweet eyes betrayed so many mysteries of the tender fluttering heart.

She was very wicked, she told herself, with secret agonies of remorse. Hector de Lutrin was Mademoiselle de Marsac's affianced husband, and she loved him; loved him as she had never loved Henri

Latouche. Indeed, she knew but too well now, made sadly wise by this real passion, that she had never loved Henri Latouche at all.

There was a change in her, and a marked one, which Henri perceived and wondered about. She scarcely seemed to live except in those brief half-hours in which Monsieur de Lutrin was with her. The bewildering delight of his presence seemed to absorb all her capacity for emotion. When he was gone, existence became a blank, and she could do nothing but calculate the probabilities as to his next visit. Would he come on Tuesday, on Wednesday, on Thursday? How many hours, how many minutes before she should hear the gracious caressing tones of his voice once more? It was only a common form of the universal fever, a foolish girl's passion for a gentleman lover. Who can tell what fatal end might have come to the story? A sudden and a calamitous end did come to it, but not that which commonly concludes such a record.

Mademoiselle de Marsac's *fête* day was in September, and upon this particular occasion she had a fancy for keeping it after a fashion of her own

Some ten miles from Nercy there was a famous grotto called the Giant's Cave, one of the objects of interest to which all visitors were taken. The place lay quite away from any high road, and was, indeed, almost inaccessible by land; but the trip was pleasant enough by water, and Henri Latouche had done many a profitable day's work in taking people to the Giant's Cave. The coast was wild and rugged between Nercy and the cavern, and the little voyage was not without peril in foul weather; but of course visitors rarely went except in settled weather, and there had been few accidents.

One evening Jeanne came home from the *château* in better spirits than usual. It was the eve of Mademoiselle's *fête* day.

'I have got you a job, Henri,' she said, cheerily; 'Mademoiselle has a friend with her—a lady from Rouen—and she wants to show her the Giant's Cave. She will give you a napoleon if you will take them there to-morrow in your sailing-boat. There will be only the two young ladies and Monsieur de Lutrin.'

This was about twice the payment the young man ordinarily asked for the voyage.

'That's just like you, Jeanne,' he said, 'always thinking of other people. I don't suppose Mademoiselle would have made such a handsome offer if you hadn't put it into her head. I'll take them with pleasure, and I'll make the *Marie Antoinette* as smart as I can for the occasion.'

'Do, Henri. She spoke so kindly. She has often noticed you at church, she says, when you've been there with Marie and me, and she knows you very well by sight. She knows that you and Marie are to be married some day.'

Marie was silent all this time, bending over her work. She had seemed quite absorbed by her needlework lately; indeed, Henri told himself that the change in her manner, that listlessness and abstraction which had so perplexed him, only arose from her being so busy about Mademoiselle de Marsac's trousseau. But Jeanne could have told how little work Marie had really done, in spite of this appearance of industry.

The next day was the 15th of September; a bright morning with a blue sky and a fresh west wind. Marie began the day in very low spirits.

She had not seen Monsieur de Lutrin for more than a week. Happy Mademoiselle Renée, who saw him continually, who would have him by her side all that long autumnal day! She thought of the white-sailed boat dancing gaily over the blue waters, and the affianced lovers sitting side by side. Would he think of her, whose beauty he had praised so often, whom he had pretended even to love? Was it likely that he would think of her? Oh, no! The utter folly of her guilty passion came home to her to-day as it had never done before; but oh, the bitter jealous pangs that rent the weak, erring heart!

Henri looked in at the cottage before he started. Perhaps he wanted to show himself to his betrothed, looking his best in his Sunday clothes, with a new ribbon round his sailor's hat, and his hair brushed to desperation.

'Will you come and look at the boat, Marie?' he said, anxious to get half an hour with his betrothed before the day's work began. 'She's a picture. I've borrowed some cushions, and made all comfortable for Mademoiselle.'

No, Marie did not care to see the boat; and yet, stay; yes, she would come to look at her, if Henri pleased. She hated the boat, she hated Henri; she hated everything and everybody that had a part in this day's festivity.

'What do I care about the boat?' she said, captiously, when they were down at the quay, and she surveyed her lover's preparations; 'I'm not going in her.'

'But you know that I'd take you to the Giant's Cave any day you cared to go, Marie,' said Henri.

'I've seen the Giant's Cave,' she answered, with a little impatient shrug.

While she was standing on the quay, Monsieur de Lutrin and the two ladies came down to the boat. Marie dropped a low curtsey, and stood aside as they passed her. How far away from them she seemed! Mademoiselle Renée gave her a gracious smile, but Monsieur de Lutrin appeared scarcely to see her. It was very hard to bear. That distant look of his cut her to the heart. In after years she always remembered his face as she had seen it then, with its listless indifferent expres-

sion. She watched them get into the boat, and waited for all the pleasant noise and bustle of the start. The last glimpse she had of them showed her the lovers sitting side by side, Mademoiselle talking, and Hector de Lutrin bending down to listen, the boat tossing gaily over the waves. Her own life, and all her own surroundings, seemed odious to her as she went home.

The two girls kept close at their needlework all the morning. The time for the marriage was drawing near, and there was still a good deal to be done. They did not talk much. Marie had grown strangely silent of late, and Jeanne was too busy for conversation. They worked on steadily till noon, and after they had eaten their frugal dinner they began again. It was nearly four o'clock, when the wind rose suddenly and shook the cottage window with sharp gusts that made the two girls look up from their work.

Jeanne's face was very grave.

'Do you know what quarter the wind is in today, Marie?' she asked, anxiously.

'No, indeed; yes, I remember Henri spoke of it this morning. It is in the south-west.'

'Great Heaven! I have heard my father say that it is a dangerous quarter for sailing from the grotto. The south-west wind blows full upon shore. I have heard him say that he has stood upon the hill yonder on a stormy day, and seen the boats driven in upon the shingle.'

Marie grew very pale; but it was not of Henri Latouche she was thinking. It was of that other one who was in the same peril.

'How pale thou art, all in a moment!' said her sister, tenderly. 'There may be no cause for fear, little one. It is not every wind that brings a wreck; and thou knowest thy lover is a good sailor and a strong swimmer. There is little fear for him.'

'Perhaps not,' thought Marie, despairingly, 'but for the other—for the other!'

The work dropped from her lap, and she opened the little window and looked out. Jeanne stooped to pick up the delicate linen and cambric: Jeanne could always think of everything. The dust was blowing in great clouds along the road, the poplars were swaying to-and-fro. A man passed whom Marie

knew, and she asked him what he thought of the weather.

'An ugly afternoon,' he said. 'Is the old father out?'

'Yes, he has gone fishing.'

'I can't say I like the look of the weather; but God is good, Mademoiselle, and your father has been out in many a storm.'

Marie turned to her sister. 'Let us go down to the quay, Jeanne. The *Marie Antoinette* may have come back, and the good father too. Come, Jeanne; we shall hear something at least.'

Jeanne put away the work as neatly as if her mind had been quite at ease. Marie stood at the window watching those swaying poplars, and thinking—not of her father, though she loved him dearly; not of the man she had promised to marry; but of Hector de Lutrin, who for the amusement of an idle hour had perverted her heart.

They went down to the quay. The boat might be in by this time, though Jeanne remembered how Mademoiselle de Marsac had said she meant to spend a long day in the cavern, and among the rocks on

that wild shore, and to return only at dusk. It would not be dusk till seven o'clock.

There was no sign of the *Marie Antoinette*, and the wind was still rising. It was as much as the two girls could do to keep their feet on the rough stone path. The sea, which had been so bright and blue in the morning, was now a murky brown, the waves rolling heavily in with white crests. The roar of the waters was almost deafening. Marie clung helplessly to her sister. She had seen many a storm before to-day, but this seemed to her worse than any she could remember.

There were a good many men and boys upon the quay, looking seaward, and one woman, watching for her husband's return with sad eyes. Jeanne and Marie had been waiting half an hour, when Jean Holbert's boat came in. He at least was safe. The two girls embraced him,—Jeanne with fervour, Marie in a half-absent way. She was thankful to Providence for his safe return, but she could not withdraw her thoughts from that other one.

'Is the *Marie Antoinette* in?' asked the old man, directly he had kissed his children.

'Not yet, father,' Jeanne answered, quietly.

'I don't like that. It's a bad night for coming round by the peak.'

'Henri is such a good sailor,' Jeanne said.

'Ay, ay, child, he's a good sailor, but he's alone with those three; and if the boat capsized, and he tried to save the others, it would be hazardous. It will be hard work sailing in the teeth of this wind.'

Marie shuddered. They had turned and left the quay, and were walking homewards; but the girl clutched her sister's arm and whispered,—

'Don't go home, Jeanne; I can't go home.'

'Father, thy supper is all ready for thee. Marie is too anxious to go home just yet, if thou wilt excuse us.'

'Poor little Marie, thou wert best at home. But as you will, children; only don't stay long. You can do no good by watching the sea.'

The old man went slowly home, the girls returned to the quay. They waited and watched for another half-hour under the dark threatening sky, in which there was only one livid line of light on the edge of the horizon.

'Come, Marie,' Jeanne said at last; 'let us go to the church and pray.'

The church was always open. It was a grand old building, almost large enough for a cathedral, with curious models of ships hanging in the nave and aisles, presented by pious seamen who had escaped great perils; with little chapels here and there, where the shrines were of a somewhat faded splendour; here and there a noble old monument sorely defaced by time and the revolutionary rabble, like the carved oaken doors, upon which maimed and noseless saints and angels testified to the malice of insensate destroyers.

Jean Holbert's daughters went into the church, Marie following her sister almost mechanically. It was growing dark in those shadowy aisles, where a lamp before an altar twinkled faintly here and there, or a little group of lighted candles cast feeble rays upon the pavement. They went into one of the aisles, and knelt down to pray in the shadow of a great granite pillar,—one sister with a calm and holy earnestness, the other with a half-despairing intensity.

'O Lord, save him, spare his life, though I may never see his face again,' she prayed.

She made the same supplication over and over again, and then repeated the Litany of our Lady in a mechanical way, her mind always with the boat and that one who was in peril. The image of Henri Latouche never arose before her. She had no power to think of anything but that one person.

They remained in the church for more than an hour, and then went back to the quay. It was now seven o'clock, and almost dark, but there were no tidings of the *Marie Antoinette.* They waited and waited, listening to the talk of the seafaring men who still loitered about the landing stairs. It was not by any means hopeful talk for them to hear. One man, who knew the sisters very well, tried to give them a little hope, but it was evident that his own ideas about the *Marie Antoinette* were not sanguine.

The girls lingered until the church clock struck eight, and then Jeanne insisted upon going home. Marie had been shivering all the time. It was worse than useless waiting there. She submitted to her

sister's will, too helpless in her misery for resistance, and they walked slowly homeward.

Halfway towards the house Jeanne gave a loud scream.

'Look, Marie!' she cried, hysterically. 'Thank God, thank God! he is safe!'

She pointed to a figure advancing towards them—the stalwart broad-shouldered figure of the young fisherman. It was indeed Henri Latouche. He was close to them by this time; he stretched out his arms to clasp Marie to his breast.

'My darling!' he cried, tenderly, 'I never thought to see thy face again.'

She held him off with extended hands, and an awful look in her eyes.

'Don't touch me,' she said. 'Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

Henri stared at her with a bewildered air, and then turned to Jeanne. 'Bring her home,' he said. —'Come, Marie.'

'I will not stir a step. Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

'Jeanne, bring her home. There has been an

accident—the boat capsized off the peak; the two young ladies are safe. I swam on shore with them —they are at a farmhouse yonder; and I walked across the fields here. My boat is lost. It has been a sad day's work.'

'Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

'He is drowned, Marie. I did my best to save him, but he could not swim. And there were the other two. It was no use. I could not save them all.'

Marie gave a great cry, and fell on the ground at his feet. He lifted her up, and carried her in his arms as easily as if she had been a little child. She was quite unconscious, her head lying on his shoulder.

'Jeanne,' he said, in a husky voice, 'what does this mean?'

'I don't know.'

'What was Monsieur de Lutrin to her, that she should take his death like this?'

'He was nothing to her. He had spoken to her once or twice, that was all.'

They learned more a few days later; for Marie Holbert's swoon was followed by a brain fever, in

which the girl raved about her drowned lover. Henri Latouche discovered how completely her heart had been stolen from him, if it had ever been his.

He bore the blow manfully, though it was a crushing one. He helped to nurse the sick girl through that dismal time, and on her recovery treated her with brotherly tenderness. But he told her gently one day that the bond between them was broken, and that he released her from her promise. She only bowed her head, and said in a low voice, 'You are right, Henri; I could never have loved you as you deserved.'

A few days after this she went to the convent, and told the nuns that she wanted to join their sisterhood. There were no difficulties; her skill in lace-making would render her a self-supporting member of the community. She said nothing to Jeanne or to her father until all was settled, and she was about to enter upon her novitiate. The old fisherman was too good a Catholic to offer much opposition to her wishes. It was hard to part with her; but she would not be far away, and she would come to see him often, she told him.

Five years after the wreck of the *Marie Antoinette*, Henri Latouche asked Jeanne Holbert to be his wife. The old wound had healed, and he had found out the value of the brave unselfish woman who had loved him from her childhood.

# SEBASTIAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### A FINE GENTLEMAN.

When Sir Jasper Lydford came home from the grand tour, he brought with him, besides a large and various collection of cameos, intaglios, mosaics, and other trumpery palmed upon him by astute foreign traders, two living treasures, of which he was justly proud. The first was Florio Benoni, his Italian valet; the second was Sebastian, his favourite dog—an animal of the true St. Bernard breed, purchased by Sir Jasper at the hospital in the mountains, where he had spent a night with much satisfaction to himself and the monks, whose courtesies he had acknowledged with becoming liberality.

Sir Jasper was fourth baronet of a good old Somersetshire family, and the owner of a fine estate between Porlock and Wiveliscombe. It is just a

century ago since he finished his stately perambulation of Europe in his own coach, and crossed from Antwerp in a clumsy old tub of a vessel, after four years of slow and industrious travel. He was five-and-twenty, and had been his own master ever since he attained his majority; until which happy event he had been under the tutelage of two guardians and the Court of Chancery; his father and mother having been swept off by a malignant fever at their house in Brook Street, when Jasper was still in petticoats. Fever used to walk in high places in those days, as any one may discover who reads Horace Walpole's letters, and marks how often he records the sudden desolation wrought in noble families by this fell destroyer.

Sir Jasper Lydford was essentially a fine gentleman, and belonged to a period when fine gentlemen were of a somewhat loftier mould than they pretend to now-a-days. The macaroni of Walpole's time aspired to be thought a wit; he cultivated belles-lettres, dabbled a little with art, professed no weariness of earth, sun, and moon, but rather affected a kindly interest in that creation which lay, like the

brutes round Orpheus, at his feet, charmed into submission by his splendid graces. He was liberal to lavishness; devoted a good deal of his leisure to play, and lost his money with a superb tranquillity; swore a good deal, drank deeply, but was never seen intoxicated; turned night into day, yet contrived to exhibit himself in the sunshine when fashion demanded the sacrifice; flattered women with the homage of a devotee, and broke their hearts with a gentlemanlike placidity. 'After me the deluge,' was his motto; and when he saw the deluge coming, he generally shot himself, or cut his throat, to the surprise of his friends and his valet, and the despair of his creditors. He had neither religion nor principles; but he danced exquisitely, was a perfect swordsman, contributed dainty versicles to 'The Wreath' or 'The Casket,' and now and then wrote an essay for 'The World.'

Sir Jasper Lydford had not yet developed into this splendid creature. He was still in the bud; but he promised well, and Florio, his valet, was training him. Florio was a grave person of middle age, who had trained more than one fine gentleman

of the British nation. He was with Lord Minehead when that unfortunate nobleman blew out his brains at Florence, in consequence of some gambling transaction; and he had gone straight from his master's grave to the service of Sir Jasper Lydford, who thought himself fortunate to obtain such a treasure. Florio had travelled all over the world—the polite world, that is to say,—from the quaint old palaces of the Hague to the new-built quays and bridges of Petersburg. He was a most accomplished person, spoke four languages, quoted Horace and Catullus, and read Machiavelli for his own delectation. He possessed an imperturbable temper, and could be sworn at with impunity, although so superior a person. Insult or contumely seemed hardly to touch him—as if he belonged to a loftier region than the fopling who spurned him. He was serious and silent; performing all his duties with a wondrous ease and precision, and seeming to take as much delight in arraying his master in the gorgeous and graceful fashion of the day as a painter feels in the picture that grows and glows into life and beauty on his canvas.

To Florio Benoni Sir Jasper attached himself with as near an approach to friendship as a fine gentleman could possibly feel for his paid attendant. When he was laid up with ague in Venice, Florio nursed him, and read to him, and played piquet with him: when he was near death with a tertian fever at Vienna, Florio brought him round. Florio could write his letters—in a small, cramped Italian hand, certainly, but with perfect propriety of language. Florio paid his bills, and would not allow him to be cheated by those Continental harpies who deem a young Englishman travelling in his own coach their especial prey.

Yes, Sir Jasper was really attached to Florio Benoni; but he did not love him so well as that four-footed friend, Sebastian. There was a nearer approach to equality between the fine gentleman and his dog than between the fine gentleman and his valet. Sebastian was Sir Jasper's playfellow and companion. At night he lay on the threshold of the door between his master's bedchamber and dressing-room. He was a brute of marvellous intelligence—a huge and powerful animal, black as Erebus, save for

a little fringe of white about his eyes, and one white spot at the end of his massive tail. Sir Jasper had a suspicion that the dog understood the human tongue. He was a watchful beast, and his slumbers were of the lightest. There was no den of thieves, howsoever vile, that Sir Jasper would have feared to enter with Sebastian at his heels. Not a dog to be cajoled by the enemy, or to be bribed by poisoned meats. A dog to make burglars shake in their list slippers.

Sir Jasper spent a season in London, mixed in the most polite society, fought a duel, entangled himself in two or three flirtations, but kept tolerably heart-whole; played high, and was unlucky in his cards. So adverse was fortune, that when the London season was over, Sir Jasper had overdrawn his banking account, and was fain to post down to Lydford Manor to see what could be got in the way of rents. His estate was managed by a land-steward—a solicitor in a small way at Wiveliscombe, who lived upon this stewardship, like his father before him.

'Florio,' said the baronet, 'we must go down to

my place in Somersetshire. It's a dismal old dungeon, I know, though I don't remember much about it. I've not been there since I was a youngster.'

Florio shrugged his shoulders and smiled, with that gravely courteous air of his which implied that all places were alike to him, provided they were but pleasing or convenient to his master.

But in plain truth it was somewhat inconvenient to Benoni to be carried away thus suddenly from the metropolis. He, too, had lived his life, and courted the blind goddess, and had his schemes, and speculations, and entanglements. It was awkward in the extreme to have his career in London thus brought to a close—snapped short off like a thread cut by the fatal shears.

Sir Jasper Lydford was a gentleman of warm temper and great energy—prone to sudden impulses and unconsidered actions. No sooner had he made up his mind to go down to Somersetshire than he was eager to start.

'Tell them to get post-horses for my travelling chariot,' he said, while Benoni was curling and powdering him. 'I burn to see the old place

again, dreary as it must be by this time; and London is as dull as a graveyard—all the pretty women gone to Bath or Tunbridge.'

'Weather very warm for travelling,' insinuated Benoni.

'Weather insufferable for London,' yawned Sir Jasper, looking at the last number of 'The World' through his eye-glass. 'Horry Walpole says this week's paper is by Chesterfield; but it's vastly stupid, whoever wrote it.'

'They say the small-pox is raging in the west of England; but of course, if my lord wishes to revisit his château—' murmured Benoni, with an air of resignation, as if life or death were immaterial to him personally. He always called Sir Jasper 'my lord'; and, although he could speak four languages, had never yet mastered the difference between a baronetcy and a peerage.

'If it is written in the book of fate that we are to die of the small-pox, we shall get it, wherever we may be. Did it not reach the French king upon his throne, t'other day? You may order the carriage for noon, Florio. And yon need take but

little trouble about my things,—half-a-dozen waistcoats, and a dozen or so of cravats—the coquelicot suit, and the myrtle-green—the grey tiffany, perhaps. I may not stay above a week. The place will be deadly dull, no doubt. I am only going to get some money. That cursed faro has exhausted my funds, and the midsummer rents ought to be got in by this time.'

It was only the second week in July; but Sir Jasper's necessities made him eager.

Benoni's looks expressed a grave interest.

'My lord is going to get money from his lands? he inquired.

'What else dost thou suppose the earth was made for? We do not keep corn-fields or farmyards for playthings. Land bestows a certain kind of distinction upon an Englishman, Benoni; but 'tis a deuced bad investment of his fortune. If my father had employed his capital in commerce, and been lucky in his ventures, I should have thousands where I have hundreds. But heaven made me a country gentleman, and I must e'en be content.'

Eleven o'clock struck before Sir Jasper left his

dressing-room; but Benoni had his master's portmanteaux packed and the travelling chariot at the door upon the stroke of twelve. When Sir Jasper came out of the dining-room, where he had been sipping his chocolate and trifling with an epicurean breakfast, Sebastian followed close upon his master's heels, fawning upon him, and whining as if he suspected mischief.

'The faithful brute thinks I am going to leave him,' said Sir Jasper, patting the big blunt black head which had thrust itself affectionately against his breast.

'My lord will not take the dog to Somersetshire?' exclaimed Benoni, astonished.

'Not take him! Dost thou think I'd leave a beast that loves me to the tender mercies of a St. James's lodging-house? He'd be starved, or poisoned, or stole, perchance, before I came back. No; Sebastian goes with his master.'

## CHAPTER II.

### AT HIS GATES.

THE journey into Somersetshire was long and fatiguing, though the road lay through a land full of summer beauty. It was the great Bath road, famous for its danger from gentlemen of the Dick Turpin breed. Sir Jasper lolled in his chariot, and tossed over the papers, and yawned a little over the last volume of fashionable poetry—the mildest dilution of Pope and Gay—and slept a good deal, and caressed Sebastian. It was fine dry weather, which promised well for the harvest, but was somewhat exhausting for humanity. Sir Jasper's tiffany suit was in no wise too cool.

'If I'd worn the damask I should have been suffocated,' he said.

Sebastian endured the heat and fatigue of the journey with an admirable patience. He stared out of the window, with his big tongue hanging lan-

guidly out of one side of his mouth, and his great brown eyes contemplative of the landscape. He slept even more than his master. He prowled about the yards of the fine old inns where they stopped to eat or to sleep, and, so long as he was not banished from his master, seemed supremely happy.

The longest journey must end at last; and after lying at inns three nights, and travelling for four long summer days—stopping to see an old church or a noted mansion now and then—Sir Jasper's chariot drove through the gates of his own domain.

The gates were opened by the lodge-keeper's daughter—a tall girl, with bright chestnut hair, brown eyes, and a milk-white complexion, powdered with freckles. The sight of this damsel recalled a little bit of family history to Sir Jasper's mind. Thirty years ago his father, Sir Everard, had given the lodge and an acre of garden adjoining it to a poor relation of his own—a bookish man, who had done well at Oxford, but nowhere else in the world, and who was at very low water when his distant kinsman, Sir Everard Lydford, offered him a temporary shelter.

'There's the lodge,' said Sir Everard. 'It was once a Dower-house, but part was pulled down in Queen Anne's time. There's a good garden, and 'tis a roomy cottage even now. You can keep a lad to open the gates, and you may have as much fruit and vegetables, and milk and butter and eggs, as you like from the farm. This may serve while you look about you for a fresh start in life.'

This humble shelter the poor scholar accepted gladly and gratefully. He brought a big chest of books and a very small trunk of clothes to the cottage at the gates of Lydford Manor. These were all his earthly goods. Sir Everard's housekeeper put in some old furniture which had been decaying in lofts and lumber-rooms, and the scholar, who had taste and handiness as well as book learning, soon dressed up and adorned his modest dwelling. He made it so pretty that the lodge was the admiration of most visitors who came to the Manor. But that fresh start in life which Sir Everard had talked of never came. His poor kinsman was too happy at Lydford with his books and his roses to care for doing battle with adverse fate. Fortune had never

meant him to be rich or successful; but Heaven had meant him to be happy. Sitting in the sun on his well-mown grass-plot, poring over a Dutch variorum edition of his favourite Horace, he envied neither king nor kaiser.

He asked Sir Everard for permission to live and die there, and Sir Everard granted the boon with all his heart. His kinsman was modest, and asked for nothing more than had been offered in the first instance. All the servants on the estate adored him. They had never known so perfect a gentleman. So life went on, without a ripple, for about ten years; and then the poor scholar fell in love, and asked his kinsman's permission to marry —or, rather, to remain at the lodge after his marriage, having quite made up his mind to take a wife.

Sir Everard said yes, and wanted to make him a present of a hundred-pound bank-bill. But this the scholar refused with gentle dignity.

'You have given me a home,' he said, 'and a pleasant one. I will never impose upon your generosity. I earn a little money by translations and

revisions for the London booksellers—quite enough for my wants.'

'But a wife will be different,' suggested Sir Everard; 'she will have different notions of life.'

'My wife will be my second self, and will be happy in the simple life that pleases me,' answered Mr. Dorillon with confidence.

The young lady he married was the curate's daughter, who had been reared on the narrowest means, and had one of those sweet natures to which worldly wealth seems but dross when weighed against affection. She came to the scholar's cottage with as much delight as if she had been led home to a palace, and beautified and glorified his life for two short years ere envious death snatched her from his side.

Dark was the gloom of the years that followed that bitter parting. For a little while the scholar's mind went astray; then came a time of dull despair, a sense of aching misery—days that brought no comfort—nights that knew not rest. The pretty cottage was neglected; the bright parasites that mantled its walls grew wild and overran the thatched

roof; the roses were uncared for. But God is merciful, and Time is a mighty healer. One day Stephen Dorillon awakened to the knowledge that he had a lovely and loving child yearning for his affection. He opened his heart to this motherless girl, and she became dear as her mother had been to him. He took comfort, and his days resumed their placid course; the old flavour came back to the books he loved; and the grey-haired student, aged more by sorrow than by time, was able to lift up his voice with Job in his affliction and say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'

The memory of this friendly story flashed upon Sir Jasper as he drove past the old half-timbered cottage, covered with roses and myrtle, honey-suckle and jessamine. The roses were cared for now, and made a blaze of bloom on the rough-cast wall. There were birdcages in the open casements—birds singing—butterflies skimming about in the flowery forecourt. Sebastian put his head out of the window and gave a joyous bark, as if he saluted the pretty picture.

'Can that fine girl be old Dorillon's daughter?' wondered Sir Jasper, putting up his glass and looking back at the fair vision.

He could catch but a glimpse of the tall slim figure, the glowing chestnut hair, quilted petticoat, and flowered chintz gown.

This was about all that was fair or beautiful at Lydford Manor. The old house itself had been sorely neglected, both by the guardians of Sir Jasper's minority and by Sir Jasper himself. It was a solid old mansion of the first Charles's time—a house in the shape of a capital E. There was a garden in front, and a fountain, and a dry moat dividing the garden from the park; but the garden was grim and weedy; the gravel walks were gangrened and moss-grown; the fountain had never played since Sir Everard's time.

The inside of the house smelt as chill and damp as a family vault. Shutters had been kept shut; doors opened with an awful clanking like the portals of a gaol. Sir Jasper shuddered as he walked through the desolate rooms. Benoni's sallow complexion assumed a greenish hue. Sebastian sniffed in cor-

ners, and gave forth low growls, as if he smelt brigands and assassins behind the panelling; but perhaps he only scented mice.

The housekeeper was ancient and deaf, and as much astonished by her lord's arrival as if Jupiter had dropped from the clouds. She and a brace of country girls were the sole inhabitants of the deserted old house; but even with this scanty establishment Benoni contrived to make things comfortable before nightfall. He had three of the lightest and pleasantest rooms got ready for his master—as bedchamber, dressing-closet, and study; a suite of apartments on the first floor, fronting southwards, and overlooking garden and park. The house lay in a valley, and to the left, yonder, above the trees, Sir Jasper could just see the white walls and rose-wreathed chimney-stack of Mr. Dorillon's cottage. It was a small thing, but it pleased him.

He dined and slept comfortably, thanks to the all-accomplished Benoni, who was a cook by innate genius as he was a valet by profession. It was Benoni who fried the cutlets, and tossed the omelet

for his master's table, and who took care that the linen for his master's bed was duly aired.

'What should I do without thee, my Benoni, in a savage place like this?' cried the sybarite, as he stretched himself on the best feather-bed in the old manor-house. 'Thou art a treasure of ingenuity and excellence. And now read me Goldoni's play of "Pamela," which is much shorter and more amusing than Richardson's novel, while I sink into a placid slumber. Has Sebastian made himself comfortable?'

'Yes, my lord.'

A rug had been spread for the St. Bernard at the foot of his master's four-poster.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MIDSUMMER RENTS.

Sir Jasper sent for his land-steward early next morning, and frankly told him he was a pauper.

'You must get me the Midsummer rents without an hour's delay,' he said.

'Impossible!' cried Mr. Dibber. 'The tenants never pay their Midsummer rents till pretty close upon Michaelmas!'

And then he gave a dozen good agricultural reasons why the farmers should be accorded this much grace.

'I don't care a rush for their cattle, or their pigs, or their cider, or their corn,' replied Sir Jasper. 'I've lost all my money at faro, and I must have some more to go on with. I am going to Paris next week, to see the new king and queen.'

Benoni was present at this conversation, and lent an attentive ear. Mr. Dibber, the steward, promised

to do his best with the tenants, early as it was in the quarter. There were some wealthy farmers among them, who would not mind paying promptly to oblige their landlord. He ventured to promise his employer six or seven hundred pounds in the course of the following day, in hard cash.

'That will do, I think, Benoni,' said Sir Jasper, appealing to his valet. 'Twill last us for a month or six weeks in Paris!'

When Mr. Dibber had retired, the young baronet took up his hat and cane and strolled out, dressed and powdered as for the Mall, and breathing delicate odours of Maréchale and attar of roses, to survey his domain. He had not seen it since he was a school-boy, with a strong inclination to steal his own apples. Sebastian accompanied his master, full of life and gaiety: rushing off to pursue imaginary game, rolling on the dewy grass, revelling in the freshness and beauty of the country, the width and liberty whereof must have been a great relief to his canine mind after the elegant restraint of St. James's. Everything about the manor-house wore the same grim, deserted look: empty stables, empty dog-kennels, coach-houses

in which ancient vehicles were slowly rotting, a prey to time and moths—everywhere the gloom of the grave. No wonder that Sir Jasper turned his back upon the stately old hulk, and walked down the avenue to find a little more brightness and domesticity at Mr. Dorillon's cottage. Sebastian frisked before his master all the way, tearing about the park like a demented dog, chasing the silvery-tailed rabbits, and sending the red-brown squirrels flying up the beech trees. Sir Jasper introduced himself to the old scholar, who received him graciously, but without a shade of subservience or sycophancy.

'You are like my generous friend, your father,' he said. And then it dawned slowly upon his dreamy mind that this arrival of the master of Lydford might be his own notice to quit. It would be like tearing up an old tree to root him from the soil; but who could tell what ideas a young gentleman of fashion might have?

'You are, perchance, contemplating alterations and improvements at the Manor?' he said, in his gentle voice; 'and you may require this cottage for some other purpose than the shelter of old age?'

Whereupon Sir Jasper protested with eagerness that the cottage was entirely at Mr. Dorillon's service, and should always remain so. Nay, he in amanner laid the whole domain at his old friend's feet, declaring that he was proud and happy to have so accomplished a gentleman resident on his estate.

'But I am afraid you are without proper service in this Bœotian district,' said Sir Jasper. 'I was inexpressibly shocked to see Miss Dorillon open the gate yesterday evening!'

'The lad who ordinarily attends to that duty —which, in sooth, rarely calls for his attention— had gone home to his supper,' explained the scholar; 'but my daughter is not proud. She has received the education of a gentlewoman; but she knows that when I am gone she may have to accept a dependent position.'

Miss Dorillon entered suddenly at this moment, and drew back, blushing rosy red at sight of the town gentleman, whom her father made haste to present to her as the son of his benefactor. Sir Jasper's kindly air soon set her at ease, and she was ready to talk to him about her garden, and the

church, and the village, which, with the neglected old park, comprised the only world she knew outside her father's library. Never had Sir Jasper seen so lovely a creature; or so, at any rate, did he think as he talked with her. All his St. James's beauties—with their satin sacques, and Gainsborough hats, and powder and perfumery, and stately curtseys, and flippant smartness of speech—faded before this country girl, with her innate distinction and her unconscious rustic grace. In a word, Sir Jasper, after half losing his heart three times over during the London season last past, lost it altogether to Phillis Dorillon in an hour.

He walked back to the manor-house slowly, in a waking dream, wondering how he should live till it would be decent to call at Mr. Dorillon's cottage again. The rest of the day hung heavy on his hands. He played with Sebastian, and explored the stables, and examined the dusty old library, where the wisdom of the ages had suffered considerably from damp and mildew. Shakespeare was as spotty as if he had had the small-pox; Milton's pages were tarnished and green; Bacon smelt of decay.

After dinner, Sir Jasper contrived to pass Mr. Dorillon's cottage, on pretence of going into the village—with Sebastian at his heels as usual,—and finding the old gentleman trimming his roses went no further, but spent an hour in conversation, during the latter half of which Phillis was present. He went home in another dream, and sat late reading 'Romeo and Juliet,' and thinking how true to nature was the poet's picture of sweet, sudden love.

Next day he spent another hour at the cottage, where Sebastian had already made himself a favourite. The dog had taken it into his head to adore Miss Dorillon from the beginning of their acquaintance, and she was delighted with him. He filled up all awkward gaps in the conversation, and was altogether the pleasantest company, even when he only sat staring amiably, with his tongue out, and wagged his approbation of the company with his big tail, which went flip-flop on the beeswaxed floor of Mr. Dorillon's book-lined parlour.

Sir Jasper now began to have doubts as to the wisdom of that intended departure for the Con-

tinent which he had talked about. The weather would be insufferably warm in Paris; and he could manage to live a little longer without standing amongst a perspiring crowd to see the French king and queen dine in public on a Sunday afternoon. Better delay his visit till the early winter, perhaps, when there would be masquerades and festivities such as the king's gay young brothers affected.

In the meanwhile Sir Jasper felt inclined to patch up his neglected old house, and enjoy the pleasures of country life. A few hundreds judiciously spent would brighten the aspect of things wonderfully. A couple of saddle-horses in the stable, a pointer or two, and a brace of setters in the kennels, a modest bachelor household in the servants' offices—Benoni would soon put matters in train.

The young baronet communicated these new ideas to his valet while he was dining. The Italian listened in respectful silence; and as he was standing behind his master, Sir Jasper did not see the gloom which darkened his countenance as he received this communication. Life in a Somerset-

shire manor-house, were it even for the briefest span, was not at all to Benoni's mind.

After dinner came Mr. Dibber, the steward, with six hundred and fifty-seven pounds, partly in dirty provincial bank notes, and partly in gold; the whole amount tied in a soiled canvas bag. There was a good deal of gold, and the sum made a tolerable heap as Mr. Dibber put down the bag on the polished mahogany table among the old-fashioned dessert dishes. Sir Jasper was grateful for his agent's promptitude.

'You can put the bag in yonder cabinet, Florio,' he said to his valet, giving him the key of a Dutch cabinet in marqueterie work, which had taken his fancy. It was a most elaborate piece of joinery, containing innumerable hiding-places for small treasures—drawers within drawers, cupboards inside cupboards, false bottoms, and simulations of all kinds.

Florio put the bag in one of the innermost compartments, and stood for a minute or so contemplating this lavish waste of mechanical ingenuity.

'Lock the cabinet and give me the key,' said Sir Jasper; whereupon Florio Benoni closed the

folding-doors, which were decorated with a Scriptural subject in inlaid work, and brought his master the queer little brass key. The lock was about as weak and common as a lock could be.

After dinner the fine evening tempted Sir Jasper to another ramble. He whistled to Sebastian as he left his room, and, being somewhat absent-minded just now, had no idea but that the dog was following, till he had got halfway down the avenue; when he looked about him, and was surprised to see no sign of the St. Bernard. He called and whistled, but Sebastian did not appear.

'The old fellow has grown lazy from high feeding,' Sir Jasper said to himself; and strolled gaily on, twirling his clouded cane, and looking up at the rooks holding hoarse council in the waving elm-tops.

This evening good manners withheld him from visiting the cottage; but finding Mr. Dorillon at the gate, he invited that learned gentleman to accompany him to the parish church, where the scholar held forth upon Early English and Perpendicular styles, panelling and horseshoe arches, stringings and mouldings. They wasted some time, pleasantly enough, in

the whitewashed temple which had once been bright with rainbow hues, and then strolled homeward together. Sir Jasper left his friend at the gates without having seen Phillis.

His first inquiry, when Florio Benoni admitted him to the house, was for Sebastian.

Florio looked astonished.

'But was not the dog with my lord?' he asked; 'I have seen of him nothing since dinner.'

Hereupon followed much inquiry, and a prolonged investigation of the premises inside and out; but Sebastian was not to be found.

'He must have gone away with Dibber,' said Sir Jasper, much disturbed by the disappearance of his favourite. But on second thoughts he felt sure that Sebastian would not follow a stranger. Could Dibber have stolen him? Had a respectable country solicitor turned dog-stealer, tempted to crime by Sebastian's exceptional beauty? Hardly credible this; nor was Sebastian a dog to be stolen with facility. It would have been almost as easy to steal an elephant.

Sir Jasper was at his wits' end. Benoni looked thoughtful.

'It might be,' he suggested gravely, 'that some vagabond in the neighbourhood has got wind of the sum of money that my lord was to receive this evening, and that the dog has been tempted away—or even made away with.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Sir Jasper; 'I would as lief lose my best human friend as Sebastian. I know not that I have one so faithful.'

This suggestion of Florio's seemed the only probable explanation of the dog's evanishment.

'As for your burglars,' said Sir Jasper, 'I snap my fingers at them. I havea pair of horse-pistols on yonder shelf that would make a speedy finish of the ruffians; but I am inexpressibly concerned that any villain should have stolen my dog—to ill-use him, perhaps.'

The young man could almost have shed tears in his vexation and distress. Even Phillis Dorillon was forgotten in this trouble at the loss of Sebastian. Sir Jasper went to bed late, and although he dismissed his valet without the usual evening lecture from Goldoni or Metastasio, he was more wakeful than usual, and tossed and tumbled from side to side till long after midnight.

What was that which awaked him suddenly, just as he was dropping into a light slumber—something scratching at his door; a faint and plaintive whine?

He sprang out of bed, opened the door, and Sebastian crawled into the room, and laid himself at his master's feet exhausted.

Whence had the faithful creature come, and who had thus ill-used him? His side was torn; his head scratched and wounded, as if he had dragged himself with extreme difficulty through some narrow outlet; he was tightly muzzled; and a remnant of rope still hanging from his neck showed that he had been tied up somewhere. But where, and by whom? Shreds of mouldy straw were entangled with his hairy coat; his feet were wet and dirty. He was altogether a pitiable object.

Sir Jasper cut away the muzzle, which was most ingeniously constructed from old straps sewn together. He washed the dog's wounds, and brought him the remains of his own light supper from the table in the sitting-room. The creature's joy and gratitude were boundless, but he was too exhausted to be noisy in his demonstrations. He licked his masters' hands fondly, and fawned upon him, and then lay

down with a long sigh of contentment at the foot of Sir Jasper's bed.

After this, Sir Jasper went to bed with a light heart, and slept profoundly.

'Burglars, I defy you!' he exclaimed, as his head sank upon the pillow. He knew that Sebastian was a better defence than the finest pistols that were over made.

He woke once in the gray morning, fancying he had heard a noise in the next room; and looking at the open door between the two apartments, saw Sebastian walk slowly across the threshold as if returning from a morning scrutiny of the premises. Sir Jasper was curious enough to rise and open his cabinet, the dog watching him intently all the while. There was the money-bag, safe enough in the compartment where Benoni had placed it.

'Lie down, Sebastian,' said Sir Jasper, still very sleepy; and the St. Bernard laid himself down, like a lamb under the semblance of a lion.

But when Sir Jasper rose in the broad daylight, at seven o'clock, he was surprised to see that Sebastian's jowl was bloody; and the blood came from no wound of the dog's own. It was the blood of a foe.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BENONI'S DOOM.

SIR JASPER rang for his valet; but for the first time within his memory the summons remained unanswered. A man accustomed to very perfect service is prone to become exacting; and Sir Jasper felt this present inattention a positive injury. He rang half a dozen sharp successive peals, which made a clamour in the empty echoing gallery; and presently came the housekeeper's scrub—a buxom girl, with a broad grin, and a strong Somersetshire dialect—and stood on the threshold, far too frightened at the fine gentleman to think of entering the room.

'Where is Florio?' asked Sir Jasper, impatiently, disgusted at this barbarous apparition. 'I want my servant.'

The girl explained, in a tongue that was almost an unknown language to Sir Jasper, that 'Muster Benonny' was ill in bed, and deeply regretted his inability to attend his master that morning.

'Ill!' cried Sir Jasper, as if it were an outrage; 'what's the matter with him?'

'Zoar vrout,' answered the damsel.

'Is that a complaint peculiar to these parts?' asked the baronet, not in the least enlightened.

But after further explanation, it dawned upon him that Benoni was laid up with a sore throat, which ailment being often a precursor of fever, appealed to the baronet's humanity as something serious.

'Send for a doctor,' he said, 'and let the poor fellow have every attention. I can dress myself, tell him; he need not be uneasy about me. And I will come and see him presently.'

The girl departed, and in about ten minutes returned, and informed her master that Mr. Benonny had begged hard that no English doctor should be sent for. He quite understood his own ailment, and knew how to cure himself. It was a complaint to which he had been always subject.

'He has never had it since he has been in my service,' said Sir Jasper. 'I doubt the poor wretch is sickening of a putrid fever.'

Notwithstanding which suspicion, Sir Jasper went to see his servant as soon as he was dressed.

He found Benoni with his sallow complexion changed to a greenish pallor, his eyes bloodshot, his throat wrapped in linen. He seemed quite prostrate; and his voice was so weak as to be hardly audible; but his mind was as clear as ever.

'My poor fellow,' said Sir Jasper, gently; 'this is very sudden.'

Benoni explained, in his faint voice, that these attacks of his always came on suddenly. He had been accustomed to this kind of illness from boyhood. He needed no medical aid.

'Nay, Florio, but be reasonable,' urged his master. 'You are in a foreign country. Who knows how the climate may have affected you? It is just the season for ague and fever; and in England a sore throat is too often the forerunner of a fever. Let me send for a doctor—believe me, 'tis safest.'

But Benoni protested that no English medical man should come near him. They were all ignorant as dirt—they were butchers!

'Did you not tell me yourself how a conclave

of physicians gave up the Duke of Gloucester for dead—declared his case hopeless, and from that hour his grace mended? I will not have an English doctor to assassinate me. I will leave your house sooner, and die in the nearest ditch.'

'I did not think thou wert such an obstinate fool,' exclaimed Sir Jasper, angrily; upon which the sick Italian, with a quickness of temper for which his master was unprepared, retorted that he would be called fool by no man, and that he had the honour to discharge himself from his master's service, and would, with his lordship's permission, leave the manor-house so soon as he should be well enough to crawl to a coach.

Sir Jasper made haste to apologize, and declared he had called Benoni a fool in his own interest, being so anxious that he should have the benefit of medical advice. On this Benoni kissed his patron's hand, and in his turn apologized; but added that he felt himself growing old and weak, and that he must retire from service without delay. With his lordship's leave, he would travel back to London as soon as he could bear the journey.

'Old!' cried Sir Jasper; 'you are scarcely fifty.'

'I feel myself worn out,' replied the Italian.

The suddenness of all this was incomprehensible to Sir Jasper. He had counted upon keeping his servant for the next twenty years. Never before had Benoni complained of age or feebleness.

'I dare say the truth of the matter is that the rascal detests a country life,' thought the baronet, 'or he has heard of a better situation. These Italians are profound dissimulators. There never was his equal for dressing hair, and he has a hundred ways of being useful to me. It will be like the loss of my right hand to be without him. Yet I had rather lose him than Sebastian.'

He had left the dog locked in his rooms. He would hardly trust the brute out of his sight after the adventure of yesterday.

The morning hung heavy on the fine gentleman's hands. A little country life goes a long way with a man accustomed to cities. Entertaining the ideas he did about Benoni's sore throat, Sir Jasper was too conscientious to approach Mr. Dorillon's cottage. He roamed about the park with Sebastian, explored

a neighbouring wood, and went home hot and dusty, wishing that he had a horse to ride, or a friend to take a hand at cards with him. Benoni had played piquet with him many a time, when he, the master, was ill; and now he felt tempted to take a pack of cards to his valet's bedside and there beguile a summer afternoon. But this would have been unbecoming, perhaps, and not without danger, if Benoni's sore throat betokened the incubation of an infectious fever.

He went to see his valet, and found him still faint and weak, indisposed to speak much of his illness, and totally averse from receiving medical advice of any kind. He had put on a cold water poultice, he told his master, and this was the simple and effectual remedy for his complaint.

Sir Jasper roamed about the old house till dinner-time, looking at the pictures, which were for the most part trumpery,—bad copies of old Dutch and Flemish masters, spurious Holbeins as hard as tea-boards, and portraits of departed Lydfords, life size, and as works of art not worth the canvas they were painted upon.

Before sunset Sir Jasper was quite worn out. He had yawned until his jaws ached; he had even begun a sonnet after the Italian, but his rhymes did not flow freely. He cast himself prostrate on a sofa, and began to be aweary of the sun.

In this state he was discovered by Mr. Dorillon, who came to the manor-house full of alarm, having heard from the lad who worked in his garden that Sir Jasper's valet had fallen ill of a putrid fever, that his master had taken the infection from him, and that neither was likely to live through the night. Sir Jasper was delighted to see his friend, yet was anxious to keep him at arm's length.

'I know not if you are justified in sitting in the same room with me,' he said; and then he told Mr. Dorillon about Benoni's sore throat, and his own suspicion that it was a case of fever.

'The poor creature's eyes had a glassy look, and his pulse was quick and feeble when I last saw him,' he added. 'I fear he is much worse than he will confess himself.'

'I have some slight knowledge of medicine,' said the scholar, who had Lord Bacon's recipes at his

fingers' ends, and believed in that experimental philosopher as a master of medical science. 'I should be glad to see your servant. I might, perhaps, suggest something. There are numerous astringents which might be useful in such a case—"'Red rose, blackberry, myrtle, plantain, flower of pomegranate, mint, aloes well washed, myrobalanes, sloes, agrestia fragra, mastich, myrrh——"'

'I would not have you see him for worlds,' cried Sir Jasper, cutting short the catalogue; 'you might carry the contagion home to Miss Dorillon.'

'Poor child,' said the scholar, innocently, 'she was nigh swooning when she heard you were dying. She has a tender heart. I must hasten back to relieve her fears.'

'Ay, do,' cried Sir Jasper; 'I cannot bear you to stay in this fever-tainted house. But before you go I must tell you of something which happened last night, and which has puzzled me sorely.'

Sir Jasper proceeded to relate the disappearance of Sebastian, and his reappearance under such strange circumstances; the noise faintly heard in the

night; and his discovery of the dog's blood-stained jowl in the morning.

'This looked like the evidence of a struggle,' concluded Sir Jasper; 'yet I found my money safe in the cabinet.'

'Do you sleep with your door unlocked?' inquired Mr. Dorillon. 'I should have thought in this big lonely house you would have turned the key before retiring to rest.'

'I dare say I might have done so had there been any key to turn. But in this patrimonial mansion of mine everything is more or less out of repair, and the key of my sitting-room is missing.'

Mr. Dorillon threw out a surmise or two; but his theories were of a strictly mediæval character, and he was inclined to smell magic, or at least witchcraft, in this mysterious business. Sir Jasper walked to the end of the avenue with his elderly friend, and parted from him within a stone's throw of the cottage. He went slowly home in the moonlight with Sebastian; and that tender silvery light melted him as it had seldom done before, even amidst Italia's poetic scenery.

'In sooth, I fear I am in love,' he said to himself, smiling gently at his own sweet folly. 'Yesterday it was Rosaline; to-day it is Juliet—and Juliet means a real and fatal passion. But, thank God, we have no Capulets and Montagues to make a brawl out of our loves. It rests but with ourselves to marry and be happy all the days of our lives.'

He had so good an opinion of own his merits as to feel very sure of Miss Dorillon's favour. She had well-nigh swooned when she thought he was in danger! Did not that imply that she loved him?

The household drudge met him on the threshold of the manor-house with a scared countenance.

'Oh, sir, Mr. Benonny is dying,' she gasped, 'and he wants to see you sorely.'

The news smote Sir Jasper to the heart. He had almost forgotten his faithful servant in his own happy love-dream. And Benoni had nursed him and watched beside him in his hour of peril!

He hurried to his valet's room, and found Florio Benoni sitting up in bed, a ghastly figure, his face livid, the linen bandage round his throat crimson with blood. The old housekeeper was holding him

up. His eyes were turned to the door, as if watching for his master's coming.

'My poor Benoni!' said Sir Jasper gently, approaching the bed. 'But, great heaven! what is this? Your throat is bleeding! Rash man, hast thou attempted self-destruction?

'No,' answered Benoni, hoarsely; 'but my own crime has destroyed me. I sent for you, Sir Jasper, first to acquit my soul by confession of my guilt—if there be a priest of my church within call, I entreat you to have him summoned—and, next, that my awful fate should prove a warning to yourself.'

'Go,' cried Sir Jasper, taking the housekeeper's place beside Benoni; 'go—send a messenger to Taunton. There may, perchance, be a Catholic priest in the town. Let inquiry be made withou delay.'

The old woman went, shaking her head doubtfully.

'And now, my poor Benoni, we are alone,' said Sir Jasper. 'Tell me, what means this sad business?'

'It means that I tried to rob the most generous of masters,' answered the Italian. 'It means that I have been so base a slave of my own passions that

having ruined myself at the gaming-table—ay, having played many a time with money pilfered from your lordship—I was possessed with the belief that I could redeem all I had lost, and make my fortune, could I but furnish myself with a round sum of money, and play till the dice favoured me—and my run of luck came. Every man has his fortunate hour, I thought; empty pockets have balked me just at the turn of luck. We came here, and I was angry at leaving London. I was present when you received that bag of money, and the devil at my elbow whispered, "Such a sum as that would bring you certain fortune." I wrestled with the tempter. Indeed, my lord, I did not yield easily; but the whisper was always in my ear—"You may get the money so easily. You need not harm him. He will never suspect you. He can afford to lose as much, and be no worse off at the end of the year. It will but stint him of a few foolish pleasures." I listened to the fiend's suggestion, and made my plans. I might have taken the money-bag out of the cabinet in the day time while you were out walking; but had I done so, suspicion would have fallen on me. I must

make the robbery appear the work of a burglar. It must be done in the night.'

There was a pause, during which the Italian fell back upon his pillow, struggling for breath. Throughout his confession speech had been painful to him. His sentences had come in gasps.

'Tell me no more, Benoni,' cried his master. 'I can guess the rest. You shut my faithful dog in some wretched hole—'

'In a cellar under the kitchen. There was a grating; but I thought it too small for him to pass through, even had he got loose; and he was muzzled and tied up with strong rope. I meant to do him no harm. I should have contrived some means of getting him released after I had secured the money, though I might have feared to go near him myself after having once betrayed him.

'You would have been right in that,' said Sir Jasper. 'A creature so faithful would have been quick to resent treachery.'

'I came to your room in the dead of night, knowing you were a sound sleeper, and believing the dog secure in the cellar. I was a desperate man,

my lord. The fiend had me altogether in his grip by this time. Had you awakened and discovered me, I know not of what crime I might have been guilty. I had a dagger in my waistcoat. I had scarce crossed the threshold when the dog flew at me like a demon, had me on the ground, tearing my throat. Vainly did I strive to clutch my dagger; I was pinioned, mauled, and helpless. When he released me I could scarce crawl from the room. The wound and the shock together have been my death. Yes, I feel that this is death which is creeping upon me. I thought this morning that I had stanched the wound in my throat, but it burst out bleeding afresh an hour ago, and I feel that I cannot recover.'

It *was* death. Florio Benoni's brow was damp with humanity's last agony. He lingered till next morning, conscious to the last, and, assured of his master's forgiveness, strove hard to make his peace with God. No priest of the old faith came to smooth the dying sinner's passage to eternity. The messenger had failed in his errand. But Benoni died with a crucifix that had been his mother's clasped in his feeble hands, believing his sins forgiven.

A year later, and the neglected manor-house was as pleasant and cheerful a mansion as could be found in homely old England: horses in the stalls, dogs in the kennels, well-fed servants indoors and out, and all the noise and bustle of busy life from sunrise to sundown. Sir Jasper was cured of card-playing and all other London vices, and at five-and-twenty found himself, much to his own satisfaction, a sober married man and a country squire, beloved by his tenants and household, popular among his neighbours, living the life which, perhaps, of all human existences, is capable of the most pleasure and subject to the least care.

And in all his household there was no member more highly honoured than his faithful dog Sebastian.

# LEVISON'S VICTIM.

'HAVE you seen Horace Wynward?'

'No. You don't mean to say that he is here?'

'He is indeed. I saw him last night; and I think I never saw a man so much changed in so short a time.'

'For the worse?'

'Infinitely for the worse. I should scarcely have recognized him but for that peculiar look in his eyes, which I dare say you remember.'

'Yes; deep-set gray eyes, with an earnest penetrating look that seems to read one's most hidden thoughts. I'm very sorry to hear of this change in him. We were at Oxford together, you know; and his place is near my father's in Buckinghamshire. We have been fast friends for a long time; but I lost sight of him about two years ago, before I went on my Spanish rambles, and I've heard nothing of him

since. Do you think he has been leading a dissipated life—going the pace a little too violently ?'

'I don't know what he has been doing; but I fancy he must have been travelling during the last year or two, for I've never come across him in London.'

'Did you speak to him last night ?'

'No; I wanted very much to get hold of him for a few minutes' chat, but couldn't manage it. It was in one of the gambling-rooms I saw him, on the opposite side of the table. The room was crowded. He was standing looking on at the game over the heads of the players. You know how tall he is, and what a conspicuous figure anywhere. I saw him one minute, and in the next he had disappeared. I left the rooms in search of him, but he was not to be seen anywhere.'

'I shall try and hunt him up to-morrow. He must be stopping at one of the hotels. There can't be much difficulty in finding him.'

The speakers were two young Englishmen; the scene a lamplit grove of trees outside the Kursaal of a German spa. The elder, George Theobald,

was a barrister of the Inner Temple; the younger, Francis Lorrimore, was the son and heir of a Buckinghamshire squire, and a gentleman at large.

'What was the change that struck you so painfully, George?' Lorrimore asked between the puffs of his cigar; 'you couldn't have seen much of Wynward in that look across the gaming-table.'

'I saw quite enough. His face has a worn, haggard expression, he looks like a man who never sleeps; and there's a fierceness about the eyes—a contraction of the brows, a kind of restless searching look—as if he were on the watch for some one or something. In short, the poor fellow seemed to me altogether queer—the sort of man one would expect to hear of as being shut up in a madhouse, or committing suicide, or something bad of that kind.'

'I shall certainly hunt him out, George.'

'It would be only a kindness to do so, old fellow, as you and he have been intimate. Stay!' exclaimed Mr. Theobald, pointing suddenly to a figure in the distance. 'Do you see that tall man under the trees yonder? I've a notion it's the very man we're talking of.'

They rose from the bench on which they had been sitting smoking their cigars for the last half-hour, and walked in the direction of the tall figure pacing slowly under the pine trees. There was no mistaking that muscular frame—six-feet-two, if an inch—and the peculiar carriage of the head. Frank Lorrimore touched his friend lightly on the shoulder, and he turned round suddenly and faced the two young men, staring at them blankly, without a sign of recognition.

Yes, it was indeed a haggard face, with a latent fierceness in the deep-set gray eyes overshadowed by strongly marked black brows, but a face which, seen at its best, must needs have been very handsome.

'Wynward,' said Frank, 'don't you know me?'

Lorrimore held out both his hands. Wyndward took one of them slowly, looking at him like a man suddenly awakened from sleep.

'Yes,' he said, 'I know you well enough now, Frank, but you startled me just this moment. I was thinking. How well you're looking, old fellow! What, you here too, Theobald?'

'Yes; I saw you in the rooms last night,'

answered Theobald as they shook hands; 'but you were gone before I could get a chance of speaking to you. Where are you staying?'

'At the Hôtel des Etrangers. I shall be off to-morrow.'

'Don't run away in such a hurry, Horace,' said Frank; 'it looks as if you wanted to cut us.'

'I'm not very good company just now; you'd scarcely care to see much of me.'

'You are not looking very well, Horace, certainly. Have you been ill?'

'No, I am never ill; I am made of iron, you know.'

'But there's something wrong, I'm afraid.'

'There is something wrong, but nothing that sympathy or friendship can mend.'

'Don't say that, my dear fellow. Come to breakfast with me to-morrow, and tell me your troubles.'

'It's a common story enough; I shall only bore you.'

'I think you ought to know me better than that.'

'Well, I'll come, if you like,' Horace Wynward answered in a softer tone; 'I'm not very much given to confide in friendship, but you were once a kind of younger brother of mine, Frank. Yes, I'll come. How long have you been here?'

'I only came yesterday. I am at the Couronne d'Or, where I discovered my friend Theobald, happily for me, at the *table-d'hôte*. I am going back to Buckinghamshire next week. Have you been at Crofton lately?'

'No; Crofton has been shut up for the last two years. The old housekeeper is there, of course, and there are men to keep the gardens in order. I shouldn't like the idea of my mother's flower-garden being neglected; but I doubt if I shall ever live at Crofton.'

'Not when you marry, Horace?'

'Marry? Yes, when that event occurs I may change my mind,' he answered, with a scornful laugh.

'Ah, Horace, I see there is a woman at the bottom of your trouble!'

Wynward took no notice of this remark, and began to talk of indifferent subjects.

The three young men walked for some time under the pines, smoking and talking in a fragmentary manner. Horace Wynward had an absent-minded way, which was not calculated to promote a lively style of conversation; but the others indulged his humour, and did not demand much from him. It was late when they shook hands and separated.

'At ten o'clock to-morrow, Horace?' said Frank.

'I shall be with you at ten. Good night.'

Mr. Lorrimore ordered an excellent breakfast, and a little before ten o'clock awaited his friend in a pretty sitting-room overlooking the gardens of the hotel. He had been dreaming of Horace all night, and was thinking of him as he walked up and down the room waiting his arrival. As the little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour, Mr. Wynward was announced. His clothes were dusty, and he had a tired look even at that early hour. Frank welcomed him heartily.

'You look as if you had been walking, Horace,' he said, as they sat down to breakfast.

'I have been on the hills since five o'clock this morning.'

'So early?'

'Yes; I am a bad sleeper. It is better to walk than to lie tossing about hour after hour, thinking the same thoughts, with maddening repetition.'

'My dear boy, you will make yourself ill with this kind of life.'

'Don't I tell you that I am never ill? I never had a day's illness in my life. I suppose when I die I shall go down at a shot—apoplexy or heart disease. Men of my build generally do.'

'I hope you may have a long life.'

'Yes, a long life of emptiness.'

'Why shouldn't it be a useful, happy life, Horace?'

'Because it was shipwrecked two years ago. I set sail for a given port, Frank, with a fair wind in my favour; and my ship went down in sight of land, on a summer's day, without a moment's warning. I can't rig another boat, and make for another harbour, as some men can. All my world's wealth was adventured in this one argosy. That

sounds tall talk, doesn't it? but you see there is such a thing as passion in the world, and I've so much faith in your sympathy that I'm not ashamed to tell you what a fool I have been, and still am. You were such a romantic fellow five years ago, Frank; and I used to laugh at your sentimental notions.'

'Yes, I was obliged to stand a good deal of ridicule from you.'

'Let those laugh who win. It was in my last long vacation that I went to read at a quiet little village on the Sussex coast, with a retired tutor, an eccentric old fellow, but a miracle of learning. He had three daughters, the eldest of them, to my mind, the loveliest girl that ever the sun shone upon. I'm not going to make a long story of it. I think it was a case of love at sight. I know that before I had been a week in the humdrum sea-coast village, I was over head and ears in love with Laura Daventry; and at the end of a month I was happy in the belief that my love was returned. She was the dearest, brightest of girls, with a sunshiny disposition that won her friends in every direction;

and a man must have had a dull soul who could have withstood the charm of her society. I was free to make my own choice, rich enough to marry a penniless girl; and before I went back to Oxford I made her an offer. It was accepted; and I returned to the University the happiest of men.'

He drank a cup of coffee, and rose from the table to walk up and down the room.

'Well, Frank, you would imagine that nothing could arise to interfere with our happiness after this. In worldly circumstances I was what would be considered an excellent match for Miss Daventry, and I had every reason to believe that she loved me. She was very young, not quite eighteen; and I was the first man who had ever proposed to her. I left her, with the most entire confidence in her good faith; and to this hour I believe in her.'

There was a pause, and then he went on again.

'We corresponded, of course. Laura's letters were charming; and I had no greater delight than in receiving and replying to them. I had promised her to work hard for my degree, and for her sake

I kept my promise, and won it. My first thought was to carry her the news of my success; and directly the examinations were over I ran down to Sussex. I found the cottage empty. Mr. Daventry was in London; the two younger girls had gone to Devonshire, to an aunt who kept a school there. About Miss Daventry the neighbours could give me no positive information. She had left a few days before her father, but no one knew where she had gone. When I pressed them more closely they told me that it was rumoured in the village that she had gone away to be married. A gentleman from the Spanish colonies, a Mr. Levison, had been staying at the cottage for some weeks, and had disappeared about the same time as Miss Laura.'

'And you believe that she had eloped with him?'

'To this day I am ignorant as to the manner of her leaving. Her last letters were only a week old. She had told me of this Mr. Levison's residence in their household. He was a wealthy merchant, a distant relation of her father's, and was staying in Sussex for his health. This was all she had said of him. Of their approaching departure she had not

given me the slightest hint. No one in the village could tell me Mr. Daventry's London address. The cottage, a furnished one, had been given up to the landlord, and every debt paid. I went to the post-office, but the people there had received no directions as to the forwarding of letters, nor had any come as yet for Mr. Daventry.'

'The girls in Devonshire—you applied to them, I suppose?'

'I did; but they could tell me nothing. I wrote to Emily, the elder girl, begging her to send me her sister's address. She answered my letter immediately. Laura had left home with her father's full knowledge and consent, she said, but had not told her sisters where she was going. She had seemed very unhappy. The whole affair had been sudden and her father had also appeared much distressed in mind. This was all I could ascertain. I put an advertisement in the *Times*, addressed to Mr. Daventry, begging him to let me know his whereabouts; but nothing came of it. I employed a man to hunt London for him, and hunted myself; but without avail. I wasted months in this

futile search, now on one false track, now on another.'

'And you have long ago given up all hope, I suppose?' I said, as he paused, walking up and down the room with a moody face.

'Given up all hope of seeing Laura Levison alive? Yes; but not of tracking her destroyer.'

'Laura Levison! Then you think she married the Spanish merchant?'

'I am sure of it. I had been more than six months on the look-out for Mr. Daventry, and had begun to despair of finding him, when the man I employed came to me and told me that he had found the registry of a marriage between Michael Levison and Laura Daventry at an obscure church in the City, where he had occasion to make researches for another client. The date of the marriage was within a few days of Laura's departure from Sussex.'

'Strange!'

'Yes, strange that a woman could be so fickle, you would say. I felt convinced that there had been something more than girlish inconstancy at work in

this business—some motive power strong enough to induce this girl to sacrifice herself in a loveless marriage. I was confirmed in this belief when, within a very short time of the discovery of the registry, I came suddenly upon old Daventry in the street. He would willingly have avoided me; but I insisted on a conversation with him, and he reluctantly allowed me to accompany him to his lodging, a wretched place in Southwark. He was very ill, with the stamp of death upon his face, and had a craven look that convinced me it was to him I was indebted for my sorrow. I told him that I knew of his daughter's marriage, when and where it had taken place, and boldly accused him of having brought it about.'

'How did he take your accusation?'

'Like a beaten hound. He whimpered piteously, and told me that the marriage had been no wish of his. But Levison had possession of secrets which made him the veriest slave. Little by little I wrung from him the nature of these secrets. They related to forged bills of exchange, in which the old man had made free with his kinsman's name. It was a

transaction of many years ago; but Levison had used this power in order to induce Laura to marry him; and the girl, to save her father from disgrace and ruin, as she believed, had consented to become his wife. Levison had promised to do great things for the old man, but had left England immediately after his marriage, without settling a shilling on his father-in-law. It was altogether a dastardly business: the girl had been sacrificed to her father's weakness and folly. I asked him why he had not appealed to me, who could no doubt have extricated him from his difficulty; but he could give me no clear answer. He evidently had an overpowering dread of Michael Levison. I left him, utterly disgusted with his imbecility and selfishness; but, for Laura's sake, I took care that he wanted for nothing during the remainder of his life. He did not trouble me long.'

'And Mrs. Levison?'

'The old man told me that the Levisons had gone to Switzerland. I followed post-haste, and traced them from place to place, closely questioning the people at all the hotels. The accounts I heard were

by no means encouraging. The lady did not seem happy. The gentleman looked old enough to be her father, and was peevish and fretful in his manner, never letting his wife out of his sight, and evidently suffering agonies of jealousy on account of the admiration which her beauty won for her from every one they met. I traced them stage by stage, through Switzerland into Italy, and then suddenly lost the track. I concluded that they had returned to England by some other route; but all my attempts to discover traces of their return were useless. Neither by land nor by sea passage could I hear of the yellow-faced trader and his beautiful young wife. They were not a couple to be overlooked easily; and this puzzled me. Disheartened and dispirited, I halted in Paris, where I spent a couple of months in hopeless idleness—a state of utter stagnation, from which I was aroused abruptly by a communication from my agent, a private detective—a very clever fellow in his way, and well in with the police of civilized Europe. He sent me a cutting from a German newspaper, which described the discovery of a corpse in the Tyrol. It was supposed, from the

style of the dress, to be the body of an English-woman; but no indication of a name or address had been found, to give a clue to identity. Whether the dead woman had been the victim of foul play, or whether she had met her death from an accidental fall, no one had been able to decide. The body had been found at the bottom of a mountain gorge, the face disfigured by the fall from the height above. Had the victim been a native of the district, it might have been easily supposed that she had lost her footing on the mountain path; but that a stranger should have travelled alone by so un-frequented a route seemed highly improbable. The spot at which the body was found lay within a mile of a small village; but it was a place rarely visited by travellers of any description.

'Had your agent any reason to identify this woman with Mrs. Levison?'

'None; except the fact that Mrs. Levison was missing, and his natural habit of suspecting the very worst. The paragraph was nearly a month old when it reached me. I set off at once for the place named; saw the village authorities, and visited the English-

woman's grave. They showed me the dress she had worn; a black silk, very simply made. Her face had been too much disfigured by the fall, and the passage of time that had occurred before the finding of the body, for my informants to give me any minute description of her appearance. They could only tell me that her hair was dark auburn, the colour of Laura's, thick and long; and that her figure was that of a young woman.

'After exhausting every possible inquiry, I pushed on to the next village, and there received confirmation of my worst fears. A gentleman and his wife—the man of foreign appearance, but talking English, the woman young and beautiful—had stopped for a night at the chief inn of the place, and had left the next morning without a guide. The gentleman, who talked German perfectly, told the landlady that his travelling carriage and servants were to meet him at the nearest stage on the home journey. He knew every inch of the country, and wished to walk across the mountain, in order to show his wife a prospect which had struck him particularly upon his last expedition a few years before. The landlady remembered that, just before

setting out, he asked his wife some question about her watch, took it from her to regulate it, and then, after some peevish exclamation about her carelessness in leaving it unwound, put it into his waistcoat pocket. The lady was very pale and quiet, and seemed unhappy. The description which the landlady gave me was only too like the woman I was looking for.'

'And you believe there had been foul play?'

'As certainly as I believe in my own existence. This man Levison had grown tired of a wife whose affection had never been his; nay, more, I have reason to know that his unresting jealousy had intensified into a kind of hatred of her some time before the end. From the village in the Tyrol, which they left together on the bright October morning, I tracked their footsteps stage by stage back to the point at which I had lost them on the Italian frontier. In the course of my wanderings I met with a young Austrian officer who had seen them at Milan, and had ventured to pay the lady some harmless attentions. He told me that he had never seen anything so appalling as Levison's jealousy;

not an open fury, but a concentrated silent rage, which gave an almost devilish expression to the man's parchment face. He watched his wife like a lynx, and did not allow her a moment's freedom from his presence. Every one who met them pitied the beautiful girlish wife, whose misery was so evident; every one loathed her tyrant. I found that the story of the servants and the travelling carriage was a lie. The Levisons had been attended by no servants at any of the hotels where I heard of them, and had travelled always in public or in hired vehicles. The ultimate result of my inquiries left me little doubt that the dead woman was Laura Levison; and from that hour to this I have been employed, more or less, in the endeavour to find the man who murdered her.'

'And you have not been able to discover his whereabouts?' asked Frank Lorrimore.

'Not yet. I am looking for him.'

'A useless quest, Horace. What would be the result of your finding him? you have no proof to offer of his guilt. You would not take the law into your own hands?'

'By the heaven above me, I would!' answered the other, fiercely. 'I would shoot that man down with as little compunction as I would kill a mad dog.'

'I hope you may never meet him,' said Frank, solemnly.

Horace Wynward gave a short impatient sigh, and paced the room for some time in silence. His share in the breakfast had been a mere pretence. He had emptied his coffee-cup, but had eaten nothing.

'I am going back to London this afternoon, Frank.'

'On the hunt for this man?'

'Yes. My agent sent me a description of a man calling himself Lewis, a bill-discounter, who has lately set up an office in the City, and whom I believe to be Michael Levison.'

The office occupied by Mr. Lewis, the bill-discounter, was a dismal place enough, consisting of a second floor in a narrow alley called St. Guinevere's Lane. Horace Wynward presented himself at this office about a week after his arrival in London, in the character of a gentleman in difficulties.

He found Mr. Lewis exactly the kind of man he expected to see; a man of about fifty, with small crafty black eyes shining out of a sallow visage that was as dull and lifeless as a parchment mask, thin lips, and a heavy jaw and bony chin that betokened no small amount of power for evil.

Mr. Wynward presented himself under his own name; on hearing which the bill-discounter looked up at him suddenly with an exclamation of surprise.

'You know my name?' said Horace.

'Yes; I have heard your name before. I thought you were a rich man.'

'I have a good estate, but I have been rather imprudent, and am short of ready money. Where and when did you hear my name, Mr. Lewis?'

'I don't remember that. The name sounds familiar to me, that is all.'

'But you have heard of me as a rich man, you say?'

'I had an impression to that effect. But the circumstances under which I heard the name have quite escaped my memory.'

Horace pushed the question no further. He played his cards very carefully, leading the usurer to believe that he had secured a profitable prey. The preliminaries of a loan were discussed, but nothing fully settled. Before leaving the money-lender's office, Horace Wynward invited Mr. Lewis to dine with him at his lodgings, in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly, on the following evening. After a few minutes' reflection Lewis accepted the invitation.

He made his appearance at the appointed hour, dressed in a suit of shabby black, in which his sallow complexion looked more than usually parchment-like and ghastly. The door was opened by Horace Wynward in person, and the money-lender was surprised to find himself in an almost empty house. In the hall and on the staircase there were no signs of occupation whatever; but, in the dining-room, to which Horace immediately ushered his guest, there was a table ready laid for dinner, a couple of chairs, and a dumb-waiter loaded with the appliances of the meal. The dishes and sauce tureens were on a hot plate in the fender. The room was dimly lighted by four wax candles in a tarnished candelabrum.

Mr. Lewis, the money-lender, looked round him with a shudder; there was something sinister in the aspect of the room.

'It's rather a dreary-looking place, I'm afraid,' said Horace Wynward. 'I've only just taken the house, you see, and have had in a few sticks of hired furniture to keep me going till I make arrangements with an upholsterer. But you'll excuse all shortcomings, I'm sure—bachelor fare, you know.'

'I thought you said you were in lodgings, Mr. Wynward.'

'Did I?' asked the other, absently; 'a mere slip of the tongue. I took this house on lease a week ago, and am going to furnish it as soon as I am in funds.'

'And are you positively alone here?' inquired Mr. Lewis, rather suspiciously.

'Well, very nearly so. There is a charwoman somewhere in the depths below, as deaf as a post, and almost as useless. But you needn't be frightened about your dinner; I ordered it in from a confectioner in Piccadilly. We must wait upon ourselves, you

know, in a free and easy way, for that dirty old woman would take away our appetites.'

He lifted the cover of the soup tureen as he spoke. The visitor seated himself at the table with rather a nervous air, and glanced more than once in the direction of the shutters, which were closely fastened with heavy bars. He began to think there was something alarmingly eccentric in the conduct and manner of his host, and was inclined to repent having accepted the invitation, profitable as his new client promised to be.

The dinner was excellent, the wines of the finest quality; and, after drinking somewhat freely, Mr. Lewis began to be better reconciled to his position. He was a little disconcerted, however, on perceiving that his host scarcely touched either the viands or the wine, and that those deep-set gray eyes were lifted every now and then to his face with a strangely observant look. When dinner was over, Mr. Wynward heaped the dishes on the dumb-waiter, wheeled it into the next room with his own hands, and came back to his seat at the table opposite the bill-discounter, who sat meditatively sipping his claret.

Horace filled his glass, but remained for some time silent, without once lifting it to his lips. His companion watched him nervously, every moment more impressed with the belief that there was something wrong in his new client's mind, and bent on making a speedy escape. He finished his claret, looked at his watch, and rose hastily.

'I think I must wish you good night, Mr. Wynward. I am a man of early habits, and have some distance to go. My lodgings are at Brompton, nearly an hour's ride from here.'

'Stay,' said Horace, 'we have not begun business yet. It's only nine o'clock. I want an hour's quiet talk with you, Mr. Levison.'

The bill-discounter's face changed. It was almost impossible for that pallid mask of parchment to grow paler, but a sudden ghastliness came over the man's evil countenance.

'My name is Lewis,' he said, with an artificial grin.

'Lewis, or Levison. Men of your trade have as many names as they please. When you were travelling in Switzerland two years ago your name was

Levison; when you married Laura Daventry your name was Levison.'

'You are under some absurd mistake, sir. The name of Levison is strange to me.'

'Is the name of Daventry strange to you too? You recognized my name yesterday. When you first heard it, I was a happy man, Michael Levison. The blight upon me is your work. Oh, I know you well enough, and am provided with ample means for your identification. I have followed you step by step upon your travels—tracked you to the inn from which you set out one October morning, nearly a year ago, with a companion who was never seen alive by mortal eyes after that date. You are a good German scholar, Mr. Levison. Read that.'

Horace Wynward took out of his pocket-book the paragraph cut from the German paper, and laid it before his visitor. The bill-discounter pushed it away, after a hasty glance at its contents.

'What has this to do with me?' he asked.

'A great deal, Mr. Levison. The hapless woman described in that paragraph was once your wife: Laura Daventry, the girl I loved, and who returned

my love; the girl whom you basely stole from me, by trading on her natural affection for a weak, unworthy father, and whose life you made wretched, until it was foully ended by your own cruel hand. If I had stood behind you upon that lonely mountain pathway in the Tyrol, and had seen you hurl your victim to destruction, I could not be more convinced than I am that your hand did the deed; but such crimes as these are difficult—in this case perhaps impossible—to prove, and I fear you will escape the gallows There are other circumstances in your life, however more easily brought to light; and by the aid of a clever detective I have made myself master of some curious secrets in your past existence. I know the name you bore some fifteen years ago, before you settled in Trinidad as a merchant. You were at that time called Michael Lucas, and you fled from this country with a large sum of money, embezzled from your employers, Messrs. Hardwell and Oliphant, sugar brokers in Nicholas Lane. You have been 'wanted' a long time, Mr. Levison; but you would most likely have gone scot-free to the end, had I not set my agent to hunt you and your antecedents.'

Michael Levison rose from his seat hastily, trembling in every limb. Horace rose at the same moment, and the two men stood face to face—one the very image of craven fear, the other cool and self-possessed.

'This is a tissue of lies!' gasped Levison, wiping his lips nervously with a handkerchief that fluttered in his tremulous fingers. 'Have you brought me here to insult me with this madman's talk?'

'I have brought you here to your doom. There was a time when I thought that if you and I ever stood face to face, I should shoot you down like a dog; but I have changed my mind. Such carrion dogs as you are not worth the stain of blood upon an honest man's hand. It is useless to tell you how I loved the girl you murdered. Your savage nature would not comprehend any but the basest and most selfish passion. Don't stir another step—I have a loaded revolver within reach, and shall make an end of you if you attempt to quit this room. The police are on the watch for you outside, and you will leave this place for a gaol. Hark! what is that?'

It was the sound of a footstep on the stairs out-

side, a woman's light footstep, and the rustling of a silk dress. The dining-room door was ajar, and the sounds were distinctly audible in the empty house. Michael Levison made for the door, availing himself of this momentary diversion, with some vague hope of escape; but, within a few paces of the threshold, he recoiled suddenly, with a hoarse gasping cry.

The door was pushed wide open by a light hand, and a figure stood upon the threshold—a girlish figure dressed in black silk, a pale sad face framed by dark auburn hair.

'The dead returned to life!' cried Levison. 'Hide her, hide her! I can't face her! Let me go!'

He made for the other door, leading into the inner room, but found it locked, and then sank cowering down into a chair, covering his eyes with his skinny hands. The girl came softly into the room and stood by Horace Wynward.

'You have forgotten me, Mr. Levison,' she said; 'and you take me for my sister's ghost. I was always like her, and they say I have grown more so within the last two years. We had a letter from you a month ago, posted from Trinidad, telling us that

my sister Laura was well and happy there with you; yet you mistake me for the shadow of the dead!'

The frightened wretch did not look up. He had not yet recovered from the shock produced by his sister-in-law's sudden appearance. The handkerchief which he held to his lips was stained with blood. Horace Wynward went quietly to the outer door and opened it, returning presently with two men, who came softly into the room and approached Levison. He made no attempt to resist them as they slipped a pair of handcuffs on his bony wrists and led him away. There was a cab standing outside, ready to convey him to prison.

Emily Daventry sank into a chair as he was taken from the room.

'Oh, Mr. Wynward,' she said, 'I think there can be little doubt of my sister's wretched fate. The experiment which you proposed has succeeded only too well.'

Horace had been down to Devonshire to question the two girls about their sister. He had been struck by Emily's likeness to his lost love, and had persuaded her aunt to bring her up to London, in

order to identify Levison by her means, and to test the effect which her appearance might produce upon the nerves of the suspected assassin.

The police were furnished with a complicated mass of evidence against Levison in his character of clerk, merchant, and bill-discounter; but the business was of a nature that entailed much delay, and after several adjourned examinations the prisoner fell desperately ill of heart disease, from which he had suffered for years, but which grew much worse during his imprisonment. Finding his death certain, he sent for Horace Wynward, and to him confessed his crime, boasting of his wife's death with a fiendish delight in the deed, which he called an act of vengeance against his rival.

'I knew you well enough when you came home, Horace Wynward,' he said, 'and I thought it would be my happy lot to compass your ruin. You trapped me, but to the last you have the worst of it. The girl you loved is dead. She dared to tell me that she loved you; defied my anger; told me that she had sold herself to me to save her father from disgrace, and confessed that she hated me, and had

always hated me. From that hour she was doomed. Her white face was a constant reproach to me. I was goaded to madness by her tears. She used to mutter your name in her sleep. I wonder I did not cut her throat as she lay there with the name upon her lips. But I must have swung for that. So I was patient, and waited till I could have her alone with me upon the mountains. It was only a push, and she was gone. I came home alone, free from the worry and fever of her presence—except in my dreams. She has haunted those ever since, with her pale face—yes, by heaven, I have hardly known what it is to sleep, from that hour to this, without seeing her white face, and hearing the one long shriek that went up to the sky as she fell.'

He died within a few days of this interview, and before his trial could take place. Time, that heals almost all griefs, brought peace by-and-by to Horace Wynward. He furnished the house in Mayfair, and for some time led a misanthropical life there; but on paying a second visit to Devonshire, where the two Daventry girls lived their simple industrious life in their aunt's school, he discovered that Emily's

the likeness to her sister made her very dear to him, and in the following year he brought a mistress to Crofton in the person of that young lady. Together they paid a mournful visit to that lonely spot in the Tyrol where Laura Levison had perished, and stayed there while a white marble cross was erected above her grave.

# CHRISTMAS IN POSSESSION.

'But oh, Gus!' said a faltering voice, as two little white hands clung about the Captain's stalwart arm, 'suppose that dreadful man should do what he threatened, and there should be an execution!' And Captain Hawthornden's pretty, pale-faced wife shuddered, as if she had been talking of one of those sanguinary performances which, in the good old times of English history, were wont to attract crowds to Tower Hill.

'Nonsense, my love! there's not the remotest chance of such a thing,' cried the Captain, sturdily. 'Do you suppose if there were I'd go away and leave my precious petsy-wetsy in danger of falling into the hands of the Philistines?'

'And Toodleums!' exclaimed Mrs. Hawthorden, piteously. Toodleums was a pet name for that domestic miracle of beauty and genius, the first

baby. 'Imagine dreadful men taking away Toodle-ums' coral, that my own darling mother sent him!'

'I should like to see the bailiff that would put a finger on that coral!' cried the warrior, fiercely. 'But now let's talk dispassionately, my darling, for time's nearly up. It's half-past eleven. The express leaves King's Cross at 12.40, so my precious Clara must dry her pretty eyes and listen to her devoted Augustus.'

The devoted Augustus looked very handsome, and bright, and cheerful, as he bent over his tearful young wife, while two brisk little serving-maids scudded up and down stairs in quest of innumerable canes, overcoats, and courier bags, and a noble russia leather despatch-box, and skirmished with the cabman, who was groaning under the Captain's portmanteau and gun-case in the hall.

'You see, my darling, all we have to do is to look things in the face. Absalom holds a bill of mine which he refuses to renew—having, in point of fact, renewed it two or three times already—which cursed bond falls due on the 24th, Christmas Eve; the idea of any bloodsucking fellow having the

heart to refuse to renew a bill falling due on Christmas Eve! and the black-hearted scoundrel swears if it isn't paid he'll put in an execution upon these goods before the day is out. Was there ever such a dastard?'

'But you do owe him the money, don't you, Gus darling?'

'Well, yes, I owe him *some* of it, of course; but you can't call compound interest at forty per cent. a just debt.'

'But you knew what the interest was to be when you borrowed the money, didn't you, Gus darling?'

'Of course; the iniquitous rascal traded on my desperation. Women don't understand these things, you see, my love. However, scoundrel as I believe Absalom to be, I don't suppose him capable of putting in an execution on Christmas Eve, especially after the diplomatic letter I wrote him this morning. But I'll tell you what, Clara; be sure you let no stranger into the house on any pretence whatever. Sport the oak, my love, and tell your servants not to let a living creature cross the threshold.'

'Yes, dear, I'll tell them. And there's the butcher, and the grocer, and the baker, and even the milkman, Augustus dear. You don't know how insolent their young men have been lately; and, you see, you won't answer their letters, and that makes them angry.'

'Selfish bloodhounds!' cried the Captain; 'what the dooce do they want? Do they expect me to coin money? And upon my word, Clara, I don't think it's very generous on your part to torture me in this way, just as I'm off to spend Christmas with my uncle, Sir John Strathnairn—whose only son Douglas, a precious muff, by the way, stands between me and one of the oldest baronetcies and finest estates in North Britain—and am going to bore myself to death deer-stalking, and that kind of thing, entirely on your account; since this is about my only chance of squaring the old miser, and reconciling him to the idea of my imprudent marriage. It's positively selfish of you, Clara; and I hate selfishness.'

At this the young wife's tears flowed afresh. She was very young, very inexperienced, the fifth

daughter of a small gentleman farmer in Somersetshire, with no better fortune than her pretty face and bright winning manner. Augustus Hawthornden, late captain of hussars, had put the finishing stroke to a career of imprudence by falling in love with this bright hazel-eyed damsel, and marrying her off-hand, in his own impetuous way. This event had happened about eighteen months ago, immediately after the sale of the Captain's commission, the price of which he had anticipated to the last penny by means of his friends the money-lenders. Since this time the Captain and his wife had lived as mysteriously as the young ravens. They were now the inhabitants of a charming little villa at Kensington, prettily furnished by a crack West End upholsterer, and the proud and happy parents of an infant prodigy, whose laundress's account alone was no trifle, and whose baby-existence required to be sustained by the produce of one especial cow, charged extra in the dairyman's bill.

This was the aspect of affairs on the 21st of December, when Captain Hawthornden prepared to leave his Penates, on a journey to the extreme north

of Scotland, where he was to spend some weeks at the grim feudal castle of a fabulously rich uncle, Sir John Kilmarnock Strathnairn, from whom he hoped to obtain a new start in life.

'That's what I want, Clara,' he told his confiding little partner. 'The army was a mistake for a man with nothing but a beggarly younger son's portion of three hundred a year. As if any fellow in the 11th could live on his pay and a paltry three hundred a year! So, of course, I got my poor little estate mortgaged up to the eyes; and there's nothing left but the reversion to Toodleums, which no doubt he'll dispose of to the Jews before he gets it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden shook her head at this.

'Oh yes, he will, or he's not the Toodleums I take him for,' said the Captain, resolutely.

So it was that Augustus Lovat Hawthornden, scion of two good old Scottish houses, departed on his northern journey, with a view to softening the heart of his wealthy maternal uncle, and with a vague idea that Sir John Strathnairn would be induced to give him a start in some new profession —say the Church or the Bar. He knew fellows

who were doing wonders at the Bar; and he had heard of snug sinecures in the Church.

'Egad! if the worst comes to the worst, I suppose I must go in for a Government employment, and devote my mind to the investigation of the cattle plague, or the control of sewers, or some such low drudgery,' said the Captain.

So he caught his little wife in his arms, gave her a hearty kiss, and hurried off to the loaded cab that was to convey him on the first stage of his journey.

The tender young wife could not be satisfied with so brief a parting. She ran out to the cab, and there was a passionate clasping of hands, and murmured blessings made inaudible by sobs. And at the last—

'O Gus!' she cried, '*can* you go without kissing Toodleums?' And she beckoned to the little nurse, who was holding the baby up to his parents' view at a first-floor window.

'O, d—!' exclaimed the Captain, 'I can't lose the train for this kind of tomfoolery—King's Cross, cabby, as hard as you can pelt!'

The cruel cab horse went tearing off, and Mrs.

Hawthornden returned to the house with her pretty pale hair dishevelled by the bitter winter wind, and her face wet with more bitter tears. In the hall she met the cook, a fiery-faced young person, whom the inexperienced little wife always encountered with fear and trembling.

'Oh, if you please, ma'am,' said this domestic, in a breathless, gasping voice that was very alarming, 'did master leave the money for my wages—two quarters one month and three weeks azact—as you *said* you'd arst him?'

'No, Sarah,' faltered Mrs. Hawthornden; 'I'm sorry to say he could not settle *everything* this time; but directly he comes back from Scotland, he—I—I am sure all will be made right.'

'Settle everythink, indeed!' cried the cook, contemptuously. 'I should like to see anythink as *he* has settled. Settling ain't much in his way. Here have I been slaving myself to death in his service—and to wait on a gentleman that wants devilled kidneys and briled bones promiscous, for hisself and his friends, up to twelve o'clock at night and later, is not what I've been used to—going on three-

quarters of a year and never seen the colour of his money. And I can't stand it no longer. So, if you please, ma'am, I shall leave this afternoon; and if I can't get my doo by fair means, I must get it by foul; which summonsing at the County Court by his cook won't bring much credit on Captain Orthongding, I should think.'

'Oh, and if you please, mum, I should wish to leave at the same time as cook,' said the brisk young housemaid; 'not that I've got anythink to say agen you, ma'am, which you have always been a kind missus; but flesh and blood can't bear to be put off as we've been put off, and to be sworn at into the bargain without no more consideration than if we was Injy slaves.'

'Oh, very well, Sarah and Jane,' replied Mrs. Hawthornden, hopelessly, 'you must do as you please, and go away when you please. I am sure my husband will pay you to the last farthing if you can only wait patiently till his affairs are arranged; but if you can't——'

'No, mum, we can't,' answered the cook resolutely, 'We're tired of waiting. The line must be drawed

somewheres ; and when the tradespeople declines to call for orders the time has come to draw it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden left the deserters and went upstairs.

'It was unkind of them to leave it till Gus was gone,' she thought ; and then, with a thrill of horror, she considered what would happen if the nurse should also revolt. 'I can live without dinner, and I can do the housemaid's work myself,' she thought ; 'but Baby is used to Hannah, and if she went away——'

The picture was too awful for contemplation. The poor little woman ran straight to the nursery—the pretty chamber which had been so daintily furnished in the days when, rich in the sense of an open account at the upholsterer's, the Captain had given his orders with a noble recklessness.

Here she found the nursemaid, a good-tempered looking girl of eighteen, bending over the pink-curtained bassinet.

'He's a little fretful with his teeth to-day, mum,' she said.

'Oh, Hannah,' cried Clara Hawthornden, casting

herself on her knees before this homely young person, 'you won't leave me, will you—you won't de-de-desert the baby?'

'Leave Toodleums, ma'am? Bless his dear little heart! I'd as soon cut my head off as leave him. Why, Mrs. Hawthornden, if you haven't been crying! Oh, do, please, mum, get up! What could have put such a notion into your pretty head? Oh, please, mum, don't take on so!'

'I can't help it, Hannah. The others are going, and I thought you would go too; and my darling would cry for you. Oh, Hannah, we shall be all alone in the house; and the tradespeople won't call any more till Captain Hawthornden's affairs are arranged, —and we shall have n-n-nothing to eat!'

'Oh, yes, we will, mum,' replied the dauntless Hannah. 'Don't you be downhearted, mum; we'll manage somehow, depend upon it.'

'I don't know, Hannah. In the hurry of his going away I forgot to ask my husband for a little ready money; and I haven't so much as a shilling to buy Baby's biscuits.'

The girl looked aghast at this.

'Oh, how I wish mamma would send me a hamper this Christmas!' said Mrs. Hawthornden, piteously. 'She sends one to my married sister, Mrs. Tozer, every year; but papa was so angry when I married Captain Hawthornden—it was a runaway match, you know, Hannah—that he won't let my name be mentioned at home; and I haven't a friend in the world except mamma, who daren't be kind to me for fear of papa.'

'Never you mind, mum,' replied Hannah, cheerfully; 'we'll get biscuits for Baby, and new milk for Baby, somehow, or my name's not Hannah Giles. Isn't there anything in the house I could take to ——?'

Here this excellent girl made a discreet and significant pause.

'Yes, Hannah, you good, faithful creature, I know what you mean. My jewellery has gone ever so long ago; all but this poor little wedding ring, and I could scarcely part with that—unless Toodleums were starving. But there's my cashmere shawl, and the silver-gray moire that I wear at dinner parties; and if you really wouldn't mind——'

'Lor' bless you, mum, not a bit! wait till after tea to-night. I know where to take them.'

'Bless you!' cried the disconsolate young wife; 'you're a true friend, Hannah.'

At this juncture mistress and maid were interrupted by the sudden awakening of Master Toodleums; and after this diversion they went downstairs to reconnoitre the enemy's country, Toodleums crowing and dribbling on his nurse's shoulder. Below all was desolation. Curiously they explored the snug little kitchen and offices, into which the timid young housekeeper had rarely ventured to intrude during the cook's stern dominion. Awful was the havoc revealed by the present investigation: broken crockery, bottomless saucepans, knife-blades without handles, forks without prongs, grease, rags, waste, ruin, were visible in every corner. The larder was bare of everything except the heel of a stale loaf and a box of sardines, the latter being a species of *hors d'œuvres* which the lower powers had not affected.

'Oh, Hannah, what can have become of the sirloin of beef we had for the late dinner yesterday?

Such a monstrous joint, too, as the cook ordered, though I told her a little piece of roast beef. Why you and I could have lived upon it for a week!'

'And cook has taken it off in her box, I dare say,' cried Hannah. 'Oh, the barefaced hussy!'

There was evidently nothing edible in the house except the sardines, so mistress and maid were fain to wait until the shades of evening should permit the faithful Hannah to execute that somewhat delicate transaction in relation to the silver-gray moire and the cashmere shawl.

'If you don't mind taking care of the baby for an hour, mum, I'll tidy up the kitchen a bit and get the tea-things ready; and then, while the kettle's boiling, I can run round to—where I spoke of; and get some tea and sugar, and a rasher or so of bacon, and Baby's biscuits, and a fancy loaf as I come back. I don't suppose you'll care much about dinner to-day, mum.'

'Dinner!' cried Mrs. Hawthornden; 'I feel as if I should never be able to eat anything more as long as I live. Oh, Gus, if you only knew what we have to go through! Oh, my precious popsy, when *you* grow

up and marry, you must never leave your poor little wife alone at Christmas-time, with all the debts unpaid, and everybody angry.'

This apostrophe was addressed to the six months' old infant, who looked supremely indifferent to the fond appeal. Mrs. Hawthornden took the child in her arms and went to the drawing-room, where she sat in a low chair by the dull fire, and indulged in that dismal refreshment which women call 'a good cry.'

She was very desolate, very miserable. The short winter day was already darkening, the prospect without looked bleak; but in the windows of other villas the firelight shone cheerily, and the lonely young wife thought sadly of happy families assembled in those rooms; families across whose hearth the dread spectre Insolvency had never cast his gloomy shadow. And then she thought of her own distant home. The good old-fashioned rooms, always made especially gay and pleasant at this season. The chintz room and the blue room, the oak room and the cedar parlour; the bright winter flowers, and ever-blossoming chintz curtains; the fires glowing

red on every hearth ; the noble Worcester punch-bowl brought from its retirement; the chopping and mincing, and cake and pastry-making, and bustle of preparation in the housekeeper's room ; the gardener coming into the kitchen with his pile of holly and mistletoe, laurel, and bay ; the odour of Christmas that pervaded the house ; and the dear friends with whom she might never spend that holy festival again.

'Oh, if papa could see me now, I don't think he could be angry with me any more,' she said to herself, despairingly.

For nearly two hours she sat alone, singing softly to her baby, and crying more or less almost all the time. And then Hannah came in with the tea-tray, and lighted candles, and the daintiest little dish of fried bacon, and Baby's biscuits, and a jug of milk for that young gentleman's consumption.

'It's all right, mum, one pound fifteen—fifteen on the shawl, and a pound on the *more ;* but you'd never believe the trouble I had to screw him up to it. And he made me have a ticket for each. That's their artful way. I've heard father say they make mints

of money out of the tickets alone. And now do cheer up, and take your tea, that's a dear lady.'

The brisk little maiden stirred the fire, drew the curtains, arranged the table, and made all things as cheerful and pleasant as circumstances would permit. Her mistress insisted that she should share the meal; and the two took their tea together—the girl almost overcome by so great an honour, the young wife's thoughts speeding northward with the gallant Captain, who sat in the *coupé* of an express train, smoking Henry Clays, at eighteenpence apiece.

"Now don't you be downhearted, mum,' said the faithful handmaid, as she bade her mistress good night. 'I only spent three shillings this evening; and one pound twelve will carry us on till master comes home.'

This was comfort; but poor Clara had not forgotten the threatened horror of the 24th, Christmas Eve, that day to which she used to look forward at the dear old home, an old-fashioned festival enough, with its simple dissipations in the way of acted charades, snapdragon, and egg-flip.

'Oh, what a child I was!' she exclaimed; and

she had been indeed a joyous and innocent creature in those days. If she had been a calculating person, given to weigh advantages, and not the most unselfish and devoted of wives, she might have asked herself whether the proprietorship of a dashing *ci-devant* cavalry officer and his superb moustache was a privilege absolutely worth all it had cost her.

The dreaded 24th arrived, and the weary hours crept by with leaden feet. Every sound of a step in the street set Clara's heart beating. No ominous single knocks came to the door, except the faint appeal of a shivering dealer in boot-laces; for the angry tradespeople knew the Captain was away, and did not care to torment his helpless young wife uselessly, any more than they cared to supply her with goods without hope of payment. Even that long day wore itself out at last; and the mistress and maid took their tea and rasher again together before a cheerful fire, and discussed the probability that Mr. Absalom's stony heart had been melted by the softening influences of the season, and that there would be no execution.

'The very word is so dreadful,' said Mrs. Haw-

thornden; 'and yet that's better than calling a cruel thing that makes a man prisoner an "attachment." I remember Augustus telling me he had an "attachment" out against him, and it didn't sound dreadful at all; but the very next week he was taken to Whitecross Street. I wonder what they are doing at home now?—at tea, I dare say. When I shut my eyes I can see them all sitting round the great fireplace. I wonder whether any one thinks of me? I do wish mamma had contrived to send me a hamper, with a home-made pound-cake, and some mince pies, and one of our famous geese; not on my own account, but on yours, Hannah, for you've been so good to me; and I should like you to have a nice Christmas dinner, and something to take home to your poor mother to-morrow evening. But I'm a famous goose to think of such a thing; for mamma couldn't send me a hamper without papa's knowledge, and he is so *dreadfully* angry with me.'

A sharp rat-tat, something between a single knock and a postman's, sounded on the door at this moment, and gave maid and mistress a kind of galvanic shock.

'Don't let any one in, Hannah,' cried Mrs. Hawthornden. 'My husband said we were not to admit a creature.'

Hannah had skipped to the window-curtains, and was peering out at the doorstep. She jumped back into the room as if she had been shot.

'Oh be joyful, mum!' she cried. 'You've got your wish. It's a 'AMPER!'

'No!'

'Yes, mum; and *such* a big one! Ain't it lovely! And mince pies, and pound-cake, and gooses too, I'll wager. And baby shall suck a bit of roast goose to-morrow, bless him! My brother Joe's baby ain't five months old yet, and will suck the gravy out of anything as well as if he was a grown man. Oh, won't we have a merry Christmas, mum—you, and me, and Baby? and ain't I glad that cross old cook's gone!'

'It's like magic!' exclaimed Mrs. Hawthornden, as the imitation postman's knock was repeated impatiently. 'Run to the door, Hannah. You're sure it *is* a hamper?'

Lor' bless your heart, mum, as if I didn't know

a Christmas 'amper when I see one!' and the girl flew into the little hall.

It was a foolish thing to be so moved, perhaps, by such a vulgar trifle as a Christmas hamper; but Clara Hawthornden wept tears of pleasure as she waited for the welcome basket. It was not of the famous home-reared goose or home-made mince pies she thought; but of the love that had contrived the gift, the tender motherly stratagems and plottings and contrivings that must have been gone through in order to compass the seasonable surprise.

'God bless the dear mother!' she murmured as she went out into the hall, where a queer-looking little old man was just depositing a noble hamper, the very straw oozing from the interstices of which looked quite appetizing. Mrs. Hawthornden was too much moved to remember that the little old man standing in the hall was there in direct disobedience of the Captain's solemn mandate that no stranger should be admitted within that door.

'Here is sixpence for yourself, my good man,' said Clara, politely. 'Good evening.' She looked towards the open door, gently indicating that the

old man could depart; but the old man, instead of so doing, gave a little whistle, and beckoned to some one without.

In the next moment a portly stranger stood on the threshold, gaily attired in a drab overcoat and olive-green trousers, and with gold chains and lockets twinkling on his expansive waistcoat.

'Sorry to have recourse to stratagem, miss,' said this gentleman, removing the newest of white hats from the blackest and curliest of *chevelures*, 'but really, you see, the Captain's one of those people with whom one must be deeper than Garrick. Here is my warrant, miss, all correct and regular, as you may perceive. Suit of Shadrach Absalom. This old gent and I will take an inventory, miss; and he can remain on the premises afterwards.'

'What!' cried Clara, growing very white; 'do you mean to say that hamper is not from my dear mother at Somerton Manor?'

'That hamper, my dear young lady, is like the wooden horse that went into Troy. Don't trouble yourself to open it, my good girl; there's nothing but straw inside, and a brickbat or two just to give

it solidity. All stratagems are fair in love and war, and the recovery of a just debt, especially when a bill has been renewed three times, as this one has. Shadrach Absalom is my first cousin, miss, and as good a fellow as ever lived; but the Captain has really been too bad.'

'I'm sure my husband means to pay everything when he comes from Scotland, where he has gone to visit his uncle, Sir John Straithnairn,' faltered the horror-stricken Clara.

'What, do you mean to say that Captain Hawthornden has got such a pretty young creature as you for his wife, and that he can have the heart to go away and leave you to bear the brunt of his difficulties?' cried Laurence Absalom, the sheriff's officer, with honest indignation.

'I beg, sir, that you will not remark upon my husband's conduct. He always acts for the best. Oh, Hannah, what are we to do?'

'I know what I should like to do,' answered the handmaiden, spitefully; 'and that is to scratch that nasty, deceiving old man's face.'

'If you could scratch some of the dirt off it you'd

be doing him a service, my dear,' said Mr. Laurence Absalom, with easy good nature, while the old man sat quietly on the delusive hamper, the picture of grimy meekness.

Mr. Absalom called for a candle, and proceeded to explore the house, attended by the meek old man, who wiped his dirty face upon the dingiest of blue cotton handkerchiefs, and breathed very hard as he followed his commanding officer. Together the two men ransacked drawers and wardrobes, peered into chiffoniers, and violated the sanctity of writing desks, and carefully catalogued furniture and bedding, books and electro-plate china and glass, table linen and pictures. All Clara's pretty dresses, her dainty ribbons and laces, her coquettish little bonnets and innocent girlish jackets, were set down on a sheet of greasy foolscap, while the two women looked on, one of them utterly helpless and miserable, wondering what would come next.

At last the inventory was complete; and Mr. Absalom prepared to take his departure.

'Of course you'll be writing to the Captain, ma'am,' he said; 'and you'll please tell him that unless that

business is squared in five days' time his property will go to the hammer. I'm sure I'm very sorry on your account; but, you see, the Captain knew what he had to expect, and he really ought to have provided against it. Good evening, Mrs. Hawthornden. The old gent will stay till the sale. You'll find him very quiet.'

'What!' cried Clara, aghast, 'is that dreadful old man to stop in the house?'

The dreadful old man gave a grunt of assent.

'Upon my word, ma'am, I wish I was the party,' said Mr. Absalom, gallantly; 'I should consider it quite a privilege; but old Jiffins does that part of the work, and you'll find him as harmless as an old spaniel, if you don't mind his appetite; that is rather alarming, I admit. Good night.'

And with an easy nod Mr. Laurence Absalom departed, leaving the mistress and maid staring in consternation at the man in possession, who was refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff out of a screw of paper. He certainly was by no means a prepossessing individual; indeed, it is impossible to imagine grubbiness more dingy than the

grubbiness of this old man's aspect. He wore a long great coat, and of shirt or shirt collar there were no traces visible; but in lieu of these conventionalities he displayed a dirty wisp of neckerchief that had once been white, but which was now a sickly yellow. His boots seemed to have been the dress boots of a giant, and were wrinkled like the skins of French plums. On one hand he wore a roomy black glove, also of the texture of French plums. His gray hair straggled over the greasy velvet collar of his coat, in an eminently patriarchal fashion, and his bottle nose—nay, indeed, his complexion generally—was of that rubicund hue produced by copious consumption of malt and spirituous liquors, in conjunction with exposure to all kinds of weather. Such as he was, he seemed to Mrs. Hawthornden the living embodiment of a nightmare. She stood rooted to the ground, staring at him hopelessly and helplessly; and it was only the brisk Hannah who aroused her from this waking trance.

'Hadn't the old gentleman better step into master's study?' suggested the girl. 'He'll want to sit somewhere, you see, ma'am.'

'To sit? yes, and he is going to live here. Oh, Hannah, *what* shall we do?'

'Don't you be frightened, mum,' whispered the girl; 'I've lived where there's been a man in possession, and it's nothing when you're used to it. Step this way, if you please, sir,' she added, briskly, and she pointed to a little box of a room opposite the drawing-room.

The old man walked to the door of this apartment, then suddenly turned back and approached Mrs. Hawthornden, who quailed before him. To her horror he lifted his dirty hand and laid it—oh, so gently!—on her soft hair, patting her head as if she had been a child.

'Don't you be frightened, my pretty!' he said; 'I've seen a deal of trouble in my time, and I can feel for them as have their homes broke up, though it *is* my business to break 'em. It's the business that's hard-hearted, my pretty, not me. You bear that in mind, and don't you worry yourself about old Jiffins no more than if he was a old tomcat. He'll keep his place, depend upon it, and won't give no trouble to no one.'

'I'm sure you're very kind,' murmured Clara half crying; 'but it does seem so dreadful!'

'Of course it do, to a sweet young creatur' like you. But Lor' bless you, mum, there's places I go to reg'lar, as you may say, and where I'm quite like one of the fambly. The children calls me uncle. "Crikey, father!" cries one of the little chaps, "if here ain't Uncle Jiffins come back agen!" and they're quite took aback to find their parents ain't over-glad to see me. I suppose there ain't no objections to a pipe in this here room, ma'am?'

'Oh, no, no, no,' cried Clara, piteously, 'you can smoke as much as you like; and there's some of my husband's Turkish tobacco in that jar on the mantelpiece, which you can take if you please.'

'Thank you, mum. Shag's more in my way; but if you could put your hand upon a little bit of Cavendish, I should take it very kind.'

A piece of Cavendish tobacco was found, after some little trouble, and Mr. Jiffins ensconced himself in Augustus Hawthornden's easy chair—a charming chair, in which the Captain had been wont to read the papers and ponder somewhat gloomily on

financial questions; and Mr. Jiffins being duly established in this room, which was conveniently close to the hall door, and in a manner commanded the whole house, Mrs. Hawthornden and Hannah went back to the drawing-room, where Toodleums, happily unconscious of this domestic revolution, was still slumbering placidly in his bassinet.

Together the mistress and maid sat down to face life with its new responsibilities.

'I'll write to Augustus this very night, Hannah; but my letter can't go till to-morrow—perhaps not even then, as it's Christmas Day; and a letter takes such a time travelling to the Highlands; and then there would be the journey back; and oh, dear! when will Gus come to send that awful old creature away? He doesn't seem unkind, but oh, so dirty! And to think that he should be sitting in Gus's favourite chair, with his head against the antimacassar that I worked with my own hands!'

Happily the brisk little nursemaid was too cheery a creature to be altogether discomfited even by a man in possession. She gave the baby refreshment from a bottle furnished with a wonderful gutta-percha

machine, which made the feeding business look very much like laying on gas; and then she reminded her mistress that it was getting late, and shops might be closing in the neighbourhood.

'There's to-morrow's dinner, you see, mum; and then there's the old gent's supper. I suppose I'd better get a bit of cheese?'

'Oh, good gracious me!' cried Clara, 'will he want supper?'

'Lor' bless your innocence, mum, of course he will, and breakfast and dinner, and all his meals, and his beer. It's the rule, you see, mum: you finds 'em in everythink.'

With this Hannah handed her mistress the baby, and departed.

The inexperienced girl-wife sat staring apathetically at the blackened coals in the pretty steel grate. She felt as some young mother of the antediluvian period may have felt, as she sat with her child in her lap, listening to the rising waters, and waiting for the end of the world.

Hannah came back by-and-by, with bread and cheese and beer for the old man, and a modest little

joint of beef for the next day's dinner, and a quarter of a pound of tea, and other small matters, which altogether made a terrible hole in that one pound twelve shillings which alone stood between this household and destitution.

'We shall have to change the half sovereign for his beer to-morrow, mum,' said the maiden; 'but we shall hold out till the Captain comes home, depend upon it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden counted the hours that must elapse before the Captain could possibly come home, and counted them over again, till her brain grew dizzy. Her only comfort next morning was to think that some of those weary hours were gone.

Hannah waited on Mr. Jiffins, taking his meals to the Captain's snug little sanctum, and coming back to her mistress to report the awful havoc he had made with the loaf, or the alarming way he had slashed off slices from the joint.

'And I think if there was oceans of gravy, mum, he'd soak them up; for, let alone smashing his purtaters, he sops it up with his bread.'

Oh, what a dreary Christmas Day! Cabs and

carriages dashed up to other houses in the pretty suburban street; gaily dressed people went to and fro the neighbouring churches; at night music sounded and lights gleamed from many windows while Clara Hawthornden walked up and down with her fretful baby and thought of what they were doing at home—alas, her home no longer!

Toodleums had been fractious all day, and grew worse towards evening; and while Hannah went for the supper beer he took the opportunity of working himself into a paroxysm of crying that terrified the young mother out of her wits. She was pacing the room, trying in vain to soothe her infant, when the door was softly opened, and Mr. Jiffins appeared. Clara almost dropped the baby at sight of this apparition.

'Let me take him a bit,' said Mr. Jiffins, 'I'm used to babies, bless 'um.'

'Oh, please don't!' cried Clara, as the dreaded intruder advanced his grimy hands; 'indeed, indeed he wouldn't come to you.'

But, to the mother's utter astonishment, Toodleums, the most particular and capricious of babies,

did go to this grubby old man, and, after a few minutes' hushing and dandling and see-sawing in the air, did actually cease to cry.

'Bless their dear little hearts! they all come to *me*,' said Mr. Jiffins, complacently. 'I've got a grandson just this one's size; and what that little dear do suffer with the wind on his stomach is only beknown to hisself and me. It ain't temper, bless you, when they skreeks like that—it's wind; and you take my advice, and just let your gal fetch twopenn'orth of essence of peppermint—none of your Daffy for my money—and give him two drops on a lump of sugar melted in a spoonful of warm water, and he'll be as quiet as a lamb.'

Mr. Jiffins nursed the baby till Hannah came back with the beer and the change for that last half sovereign, which Mrs. Hawthornden had contemplated fondly as she parted with it for ever. The girl stared aghast on beholding her charge in the arms of the intruder; but he despatched her to the chemist's for peppermint as coolly as if he had been the infant's favourite grandfather. Mrs. Hawthornden had sunk exhausted into her chair,

and looked on with amazement while the man in possession developed a perfect genius for nursing, and entertained Toodleums with a broken tobacco-pipe and a latch-key as that young gentleman rarely allowed himself to be entertained by the most elaborate inventions of the toy-maker.

'You seem to have a wonderful power over children,' murmured Clara at last.

'I'm fond of 'em, ma'am, that's where it is; and they knows it. There's nothing gets over 'em like that,—real rightdown fondness of 'em. Now, I'll wager while you was carrying this little chap up and down just now, your mind had wandered like, and you was thinking of your own troubles, and you felt him a drag upon you.'

Clara nodded assent.

'*To* be sure!' exclaimed Mr. Jiffins, triumphantly; 'and that child knowed it,—he knowed as he hadn't got your whole heart; and you can't do nothink with a child unless you gives him your whole heart. They're the deepest little Garricks out for that, bless 'em!—Ain't you now, ducksy? Yes, o' course; you knows you is.'

Toodleums assented to this proposition with a rapturous crow.

'Bein' as it's Christmas night, mum,' said Mr. Jiffins by and by, when the peppermint had been brought and administered, 'and my disposition lively like, perhaps you wouldn't take it as a liberty if I asked leave to eat my bit of supper in here? It *is* rather lonesome in that there little room, and seems lonesomer being Christmas-time.'

What could a helpless young wife and mother say to this startling request? Mr. Jiffins was master of the situation. There was something very dreadful in sitting down to supper with this dirty old man; but Toodleums was hanging on to one of his greasy coat-buttons with the affection of a lifetime, and a man thus affected by Toodleums could not be utterly base. So Mrs. Hawthornden murmured a faint assent to the proposed arrangement. The tray was brought, modestly furnished with a piece of cheese, a loaf, a little glass dish of butter, and a jug of ale. Mr. Jiffins surveyed these simple preparations with an approving eye.

'Raw cheese is rather cold to the palate in this

weather,' he said, thoughtfully; 'what should you say now, mum, to a rabbit?'

'I am very sorry,' faltered Mrs. Hawthornden, apologetically, 'but we haven't any rabbits in the house.'

'Lor' bless you, ma'am, I means toasted cheese. If that good-tempered young woman of yours would get me the mustard-pot and a small saucepan, and then kneel down before the fire and toast a round or two of bread, I'd soon show you what I means by a rabbit.'

Hannah ran off to procure these articles, and she was presently employed in toasting cheese under the old man's direction.

'A teaspoonful of mustard, and a good lump of fresh butter, and a tablespoonful of ale, and let it simmer by the side of the fire while you toastes the bread, my dear,' said Mr. Jiffins, who nursed the baby, and looked on approvingly while the hand maid obeyed him.

To poor Clara Hawthornden it seemed like some distempered dream. 'If anybody should call!' she thought; and she had to tell herself over and over

again that ten o'clock on Christmas night was not a likely hour for callers. She thought of the joyous party in her old home—the girls in white muslin and scarlet sashes, the matrons in their rustling silks: and then of that more stately festival at Strathnairn Castle, and the black oak buffets loaded with gold plate, which her husband had so often described to her; but from these bright pictures her fancy always came back to the old man superintending the simmering cheese.

Both he and Hannah persuaded her presently to taste this delicacy. She had eaten nothing at dinner, for the sense of the old man's presence in the Captain's study had weighed upon her like an actual burden. He was not nearly so dreadful seated opposite to her with her baby on his knee. Our skeletons are never so hideous when confronted boldly as when hidden away in some dark cupboard. Mrs. Hawthornden tasted the Welsh rarebit. It was really excellent. She remembered having heard Augustus talk of eating such things at Evans's. And presently she found herself eating this toasted cheese with more appetite than anything she had tasted

since her husband's departure. Though familiar, Mr. Jiffins was not utterly wanting in reverence. He resigned the baby to Hannah, and insisted on taking his supper at the remotest corner of the table, where there was no tablecloth. The edge of the tablecloth he seemed to consider the line of demarcation; no persuasion could induce him to infringe upon it by the breadth of a hair. But at this uncomfortable corner he ate his supper with a relish that was almost contagious, and talked a good deal in a pleasant chirping manner, as he quaffed his ale. After supper he ventured upon a conundrum, and that being approved, upon another; and Mrs. Hawthornden found herself laughing quite merrily, but still with the sense that it was all a distempered dream. Dreadful as it was to be cheerful in the company of a nursemaid and of a broker's man, it was perhaps better for this lonely little wife than brooding over her woes. She slept quite soundly after the toasted cheese and the conundrums, and awoke next morning to find the cheerful Hannah at her bedside with a neatly-arranged little breakfast-tray.

'It was Mr. Jiffins as told me to bring you up your breakfast, ma'am. "Let her sleep a little late, poor pretty!" he said, "and take her a cup of tea and a new-laid egg when she wakes;" and—*would you believe it*, mum?—the old dear goes and fetches the egg hisself, while I biles the kettle, though he told me it was as much as his employment was worth to step outside our door! And if he hasn't been and hearthstoned the steps before I was up, mum, and swep' the kitchen beautiful—for a handier old man I never did see; and he says, if you could pick a bit of Irish stew for your dinner, he's a rare hand at one.'

Mrs. Hawthornden did not care to pick a bit of Irish stew, nor did she affect any dish in the preparation of which the broker's man could be manipulatively engaged; but she fully appreciated his kind wish to help her and her faithful handmaiden, and thanked him prettily for his kindness when she encountered him downstairs. Before long she had still greater reason to thank him; for Toodleums suffered severely in the cutting of an upper tooth, and both nursemaid and mother profited by grand-

father Jiffins' experience. The days went by slowly, but no longer made hideous to Clara Hawthornden by her horror of Jiffins, who, instead of an incubus, had proved himself an elderly angel in the house. Her chief trouble now arose from her husband's silence. The fifth day must soon elapse, and then there would be a sale, and she and her child would be turned out of doors, homeless, shelterless. No, not quite. Here Providence interposed in the humble guise of Jiffins.

'My married daughter's got a room as she lets, and as is now empty; and if they've the heart to turn you out of here, you can go there and welcome,' said this dingy benefactor. 'There ain't no spring sofys, nor shiny steel grates; but it's that clean you might eat your victuals off the floor; and, if you don't mind a mews, it's respectable.'

A mews! where would not the desolate mother have gone to obtain shelter for her baby?

'Oh, Mr. Jiffins!' she cried, clasping one of those grimy hands, which had once inspired her with such aversion, 'what should we do without you?'

What, indeed! The last shilling of that last half sovereign had been spent two days ago, and since then the little household had been sustained by money advanced by Jiffins.

'You'll pay me fast enough one of these odd days, I dessay,' said Jiffins, when Clara deprecated this last obligation.

For the first time since she had left her home she wrote to ask a favour from her mother. The boon she demanded was a five-pound note, wherewith to pay and reward Jiffins. Never before had she allowed the home-friends to know that her Augustus left her with one wish ungratified.

The fifth day expired. The hour of doom was near. Strange men in paper caps came to take up the carpets. The dear little china closet, in which Clara had so delighted, when the housemaid would allow her to enter it, was rifled of its contents, and dinner services, tea services, and glass were spread on the dining-room table. Bills were stuck on the outside of the house; within, nasty little bits of paper, with numbers on them, were pasted upon every article, even—oh, bitterest drop in this cup of bitter-

ness!—on the sacred bassinet of Toodleums, still a martyr to his teeth. Ignominy could go no further; and there were still no tidings of the Captain. But for Jiffins and Hannah, Clara Hawthornden must surely have died of this agony.

It was the very morning of the sale. Mr. Absalom was there in all his glory. The auctioneer had arrived. Dingy men with greasy little memorandum-books pervaded the house. Clara sat with Hannah and the baby in the little study, where strange faces peered in upon them every now and then; and intending buyers made heartless remarks about the curtains, and informed the dingy commission agents how high they were disposed to bid for the Captain's pet chair. There was no corner of the house sacred to the homeless woman's despair. Clara felt that it would have been almost better to sit in the street. The most unfriendly doorstep would have been a more peaceful resting-place than this.

Alas! in this bitter crisis even the faithful Jiffins could no longer protect her. He was sent hither and thither by the higher powers, and could not yet snatch half an hour's respite in which to conduct

Mrs. Hawthornden to the humble lodging he had secured for her.

'Oh, Hannah, I wish Mr. Jiffins would take us away from all these dreadful people!' Clara cried, piteously. She had ceased to hope for rescue from Augustus. *That* ship had foundered, and Jiffins was the lifeboat of benevolence that must carry her to the shore of safety.

'Oh, Hannah, if he would only take us to his daughter's house in the mews!' she cried; and in the next moment a hansom tore up to the door, a stentorian voice broke out into exclamations of surprise and indignation, interspersed with execrations. A shrill scream burst from the young wife's pale lips.

'Gus!' she cried, while Toodleums set up a sympathetic shriek; 'Oh, thank God, thank God!' and she must have fallen but for Hannah's supporting arms.

Yes, it was the Captain, dressed in black, and with a crape hatband. He distributed his anathemas freely as he strode into the villa. What the dash is the meaning of this dashed business? Take down

those dashed bills, and turn these dashed people out of the house; and so on. Mr. Absalom advanced politely, and suggested that if the Captain would be so kind as to settle that little matter of 326*l.* 17*s.* 6*d.* the sale need not proceed. The Captain pulled out a brand-new cheque book and signed his first cheque upon a brand new banking account, which document he handed to Mr. Absalom with an injured air.

'You ought to have known better, Absalom,' he said, 'after all our past dealing.'

'To tell you the truth, Captain, it was my experience of the past that made me rather sharp in the present,' replied the other, politely.

'Come, Clara, don't cry,' exclaimed Captain Hawthornden to the poor little woman, who was sobbing on his shoulder. 'I didn't get your letter till yesterday afternoon, and have been travelling ever since. I was away with a party in the mountains. And there's been a dreadful piece of work at Strathnairn —my cousin Douglas, Sir John's only son, killed by the explosion of his rifle. No one to blame but himself, poor beg—poor dear fellow! Sir John's awfully cut up, as well he may be; and I'm next heir to the

title and estates. Yes, little woman, you'll be Lady Strathnairn before you die; for my uncle will never marry, poor old boy! Very dreadful, ain't it, poor Douglas's death? but, of course, uncommonly jolly for us.'

'Oh, Gus, how awful for Sir John! But, thank Heaven, you have come back! You can never understand what I've suffered; and if it hadn't been for Mr. Jiffins——'

'Jiffins! who the deuce is Jiffins?'

'The man in possession. He has been so good to us—has lent us money even; and but for him we must have starved.'

'Good Heavens, Clara!' cried the Captain, aghast, you don't mean to say you've degraded yourself by borrowing money from a broker's man?'

'What could I do, dear? You left me without any money, you know,' replied the wife, innocently.

'You really ought to have known better, Clara,' said the Captain, sternly. 'But where is this Jiffins? Let me pay the fellow his confounded loan.'

'I think you'd better let me pay it, dear. If you'll give me a ten-pound note, I can make it all right.'

So Mr. Jiffins received about a thousand per cent. for his loan, which had been little more than a sovereign, and he spent New Year's Day very pleasantly in the bosom of his married daughter's household, No. 7½, Stamford Mews, Blackfriars. But perhaps at some future audit, when many such small accounts are balanced before the Great Auditor, Mr. Jiffins may receive even more than a thousand per cent. for that little loan.

# JOHN GRANGER.

A GHOST STORY.

## CHAPTER I.

'THEN there is no hope for me, Susy?'

The speaker was a stalwart young fellow of the yeoman class, with a grave, earnest face, and a frank, fearless manner. He was standing by the open window of a pleasant farmhouse parlour, by the side of a bright-eyed girl, who was leaning with folded arms upon the broad window-sill, looking shyly downwards as he talked to her.

'Is there no chance, Susy! none? Is it all over between us?'

'If you mean that I shall ever cease to think of you as one of the best friends I have in this world, John, no,' she answered; 'or that I shall ever cease

to look up to you as the noblest and truest of men, no, John—a hundred times no.'

'But I mean something more than that, Susy, and you know it as well as I do. I want you to be my wife by-and-by. I'm not in a hurry, you know, my dear. I can bide my time. You're very young yet, and may be you scarcely know your own mind. I can wait, Susy. My love will stand wear and tear. Let me have the hope of winning you by-and-by. I'm not a poor man at this present time, you know, Susy. There are three thousand pounds of old uncle Tidman's on deposit in my name in Hillborough Bank. I've been a lucky fellow in having an industrious father and a rich bachelor uncle, and with the chance of you for my wife, a few years would make me a rich man.'

'That can never be, John. I know how proud I ought to be that you should think of me like this. I'm not worthy of so much love. It isn't that I don't appreciate your merits, John; but——'

'There's some one else, eh, Susy?'

'Yes, John,' she faltered, in a very low voice, and with a vivid blush on her drooping face.

'Some one who has asked you to be his wife?'

'No, John; but I think he likes me a little, and——'

Here she stopped suddenly, finding the sentence difficult to continue.

John Granger gave a long, heavy sigh, and stood for some minutes looking at the ground in dead silence.

'I think I can guess who it is,' he said at last; 'Robert Ashley, — eh, Susy?' The blush grew deeper, and the girl's silence was a sufficient answer. 'Well, he's a fine handsome young fellow, and more likely to take a pretty girl's fancy than such a blunt, plain-spoken chap as I am; and he's a good fellow enough, as far as I know; I've nothing to say against him, Susy. But there's one man in the world I should have liked to warn you against, Susan, if I'd thought there was a shadow of a chance you'd ever listen to any love-making of his.'

'Who is that, John?'

'Your cousin, Stephen Price.'

'You needn't fear that I should ever listen to

him, John. There's little love lost between Stephen and me.'

'Isn't there? I've heard him swear that he'd have you for his wife some day, Susan. I don't like him, my dear, and I don't trust him either. It isn't only that he bears a bad character up town, as a dissipated, pleasure-loving spendthrift; there's something more than that; something below the surface that I can't find words for. I know that he's very clever. Folks say that Mr. Vollair the lawyer looks over all his faults on account of his cleverness, and that he never had a clerk to serve him so well as Stephen does. But cleverness and honesty don't always go together, Susy, and I fear that cousin of yours will come to a bad end.'

Susan Lorton did not attempt to dispute the justice of this opinion. Stephen Price was no favourite of hers, in spite of those good looks and that showy cleverness which had won him a certain amount of popularity elsewhere.

John Granger lingered at the sunny window, where the scent of a thousand roses came floating in upon the warm summer air. He lingered as if loth

to go and make an end of that interview; though the end must come, and the last words must needs be spoken very soon.

'Well, well, Susy,' he said presently, 'a man must teach himself to bear these things, even when they seem to break his life up somehow, and make an end of every hope and dream he ever had. I can't tell you how I've loved you, my dear—how I shall love you to the end of my days. Bob Ashley is a good fellow, and God grant he may make you a good husband! But I don't believe it's in him to love you as I do, Susan. He takes life pleasantly, and has his mind full of getting on in the world, you see, and he has father and mother and sisters to care for. I've got no one but you to love, Susan. I've stood quite alone in the world ever since I was a boy, and you've been all the world to me. It's bitter to bear, my dear; but it can't be helped. Don't cry, Susy darling. I'm a selfish brute to talk like this, and bring the tears into those pretty eyes. It can't be helped, my dear. Providence orders these things, you see, and we must bear them quietly. Good-bye, dear.'

He gave the girl his big, honest hand. She took it in both her own, bent over it, and kissed it tearfully.

'You'll never know how truly I respect you John,' she said. 'But don't say good-bye like that. We are to be friends always, aren't we?'

'Friends always? Yes, my dear; but friends at a distance. There's some things I couldn't bear to see. I can wish for your happiness, and pray for it honestly; but I couldn't stop at Friarsgate to see you Robert Ashley's wife. My lease of the old farm is out. I'm to call on Mr. Vollair this afternoon to talk about renewing it. I fancied you'd be mistress of the dear old place, Susy. That's been my dream for the last three years. I couldn't bear the look of the empty rooms now that dream's broken. I shall surrender the farm at once, and go to America, I've got a capital that 'll start me anywhere, and I'm not afraid of work. I've old friends out there too; my first cousin, Jim Lomax, and his wife. They went out five years ago, and have been doing wonders with a farm in New England. I shan't feel quite strange there.'

'Go to America, John, and never come back!' said Susan, despondently.

She had a sincere regard for this honest yeoman, and was grieved to the heart at the thought of the sorrow that had come to him through his unfortunate desire to be something more to her than a friend.

'Never's a long word, Susy,' he answered, in his serious straightforward way. 'Perhaps when a good many years have gone over all our heads, and when your children are beginning to grow up, I may come back and take my seat beside your hearth, and smoke my pipe with your husband. Not that I should ever cease to love you, my dear; but time would take the sting out of the old pain, and it would be only a kind of placid sorrow, like the thought of one that's long been dead. Yes, I shall come back to England after ten or fifteen years, if I live, if it's only for the sake of seeing your children —and I'll wager there 'll be one amongst them that 'll take to me almost as if it was my own, and will come to be like a child to me in my old age. I've seen such things. And now I must say good-bye, Susy; for I've got to be up town at three o'clock to

see Mr. Vollair, and I've a deal of work to do before I leave.'

'Shall you go soon, John?'

'As soon as ever I can get things settled—the farm off my hands, and so on. But I shall come to say good-bye to you and your father before I go.'

'Of course you will, John. It would be unfriendly to go without seeing father. Good-bye!'

They shook hands once more and parted. The yeoman walked slowly along the little garden path, and across a patch of furze-grown common land, on the other side of which there was a straggling wood of some extent, broken up here and there by disused gravel-pits and pools of stagnant water—a wild kind of place to pass at night, yet considered safe enough by the country people about Hillborough, as there was scarcely any part of it that was not within earshot of the high road. The narrow foot-path across this wood was a short cut between Matthew Lorton's farm and Hillborough, and John Granger took it.

He walked with a firm step and an upright

bearing, though his heart was heavy, as he went townwards that afternoon. He was a man to bear his trouble in a manly spirit, whatever it might be, and there were no traces of his disappointment in his looks or manner when he presented himself at the lawyer's house.

Mr. Vollair had a client with him; so John Granger was ushered into the clerks' office, where he found Stephen Price hard at work at a desk, in company with a smaller and younger clerk.

'Good afternoon, Granger,' he said, in a cool patronizing manner that John Granger hated; 'come about your lease, of course?'

'There is nothing else for me to come about.'

'Ah, you see, you're one of those lucky fellows who never want the help of the law to get you out of a scrape. And you're a devilish lucky fellow, too, in the matter of this lease, if you can get Friarsgate for a new term at the rent you've been paying hitherto, as I dare say you will, if you play your cards cleverly with our governor presently.'

'I am not going to ask for a new lease,' answered John Granger; 'I am going to leave Friarsgate.'

'Going to leave Friarsgate! You astound me. Have you got a better farm in your eye?'

'I am going to America.'

Stephen Price gave expression to his astonishment by a prolonged whistle, and then twisted himself round upon his stool, the better to regard Mr. Granger.

'Why, Granger, how is this?' he asked. 'A fellow like you, with plenty of money, going off to America! I thought that was the refuge for the destitute.'

'I'm tired of England, and I've a fancy for a change. I hear that a man may do very well in America, with a good knowledge of farming and a tidy bit of capital.'

'Ah, and you've got that,' said Stephen Price, with an envious sigh. 'And so you're thinking of going to America? That's very strange. I used to fancy you were sweet upon a certain pretty cousin of mine. I've seen you hanging about old Lorton's place a good deal of late years.'

John Granger did not reply to this remark. Mr. Vollair's client departed a few minutes later, and

Mr. Granger was asked to step into the lawyer's office. He found his business very easy to arrange in the manner he wished. Mr. Vollair had received more than one offer for Friarsgate farm, and there was an applicant who would be glad to get the place as soon as John Granger could relinquish it, without waiting for the expiration of his lease. This incoming tenant would no doubt be willing to take his furniture and live and dead stock at a valuation, Mr. Vollair told John. So the young farmer left the office in tolerable spirits, pleased to find there were no obstacles to his speedy departure from a home that had once been dear to him.

END OF VOL II.

J. AND W. RIDER, PRINTERS, LONDON.

AC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 051364773